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Mutus Liber

BERSERKER
BOOKS

Mutus Liber

The Mutus Liber, or 'Silent Book' of alchemy, has literally been made to speak through the eloquent commentaries of the esteemed Master of Savignies: Eugène Canseliet, the true "Philosophus per Ignem" (Philosopher by Fire), included in the excellent edition by Jean-Jacques Pauvert (1967).

The fifteen plates that make up the work are undoubtedly of inestimable value to the Infants of Science, as well as to those curious about nature who can grasp them from their very first encounter.

All the stages of the GREAT WORK are presented in their proper place, as are the 'out-of-work' stages, or preliminary preparations of the two suitable Salts that make up the Secret Fire of the Adepts; this is highly exceptional in alchemical literature, which is otherwise so abundant and fruitful! The Brothers of the Cooked Dew (Frères de la **'Rosée-Cuite'**), we have no doubt, will find there 'material' for reflection!

The actual order of the plates—and, consequently, of the alchemical operations—was deliberately concealed by the author; it is therefore essential, above all, to restore their order, and we believe it is not superfluous to provide the reader with the authentic numbering.

They will surely be grateful to us for this, but the truth is that the Secret of the 'Ars' 'Magna' always causes quite a stir amongst lovers of science and seekers of truth...

The plates should therefore be studied in the following order: 1 – 4 – 9 –

12 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 2 – 8 – 3 – 11 – 10 – 13 – 14 – 15

The *Mutus Liber* is a series of 15 plates from a manuscript of emblematic engravings on alchemy, published in 1677 in La Rochelle (France). The author of the *Mutus Liber* is unknown. The name 'Altus', which appears on the first plate, does not correspond to any real person and appears to be a pseudonym. Barbier, in his Dictionary of Anonymities, drawing on the observations of a local historian, believes that the true author is a doctor from La Rochelle named Tollé, an opinion considered erroneous by Marc Haven. It has also been attributed to Jacob Sullat, based on the anagram of the pseudonym Altus (**'High'**).

Patrick Rivière

MUTUS LIBER

[Silent Book]

First complete edition

of the original 1677 La Rochelle edition

Comments by Eugene Canseliet F.C.H., a disciple of Fulcanelli

INTRODUCTION

MUTUS LIBER… The Silent Book! Such is the surprising and abbreviated title of the treatise on alchemy, composed solely of images, which we present to the curiosity—if not the interest—of all enthusiasts. Here is the explanation that immediately follows these first two words on the opening plate, which we have translated and which appears quite promising in terms of the insights to be gleaned:

> '…in which, however, the whole of Hermetic Philosophy is represented in hieroglyphic figures; which is consecrated to the merciful God, thrice most good and most great, and dedicated solely to the sons of the art, by the author whose name is Altus.'

We are well aware of the Kabbalistic double meaning—that is, the play on words afforded by Latin—between the dative plural of *solus* and the genitive singular of *sol*, which are spelt similarly, and which allows us to interpret it as either 'dedicated to the sons of the art and of the sun' or 'dedicated solely to the sons of the art': *solisque filiis artis dedicatus*.

We find nothing else in the work apart from the few words on the penultimate and final pages; the latter, the fifteenth, the former bearing the number 14, and, for its part, the maxim in Latin words that are repeated at length, the imperative advice of which seems rather amusing in a book where ordinary reading has no opportunity to take place:

> 'ORA LEGE LEGE LEGE RELEGE LABORA ET INVENIES'
> Pray, read, read, read, reread, work, and you shall find.

Charitable, encouraging and precise advice which, when followed with humility and patience, provides the key that unlocks the garden of the philosophers and their path of access to the unknown world of the universal subconscious. Alchemy bestows, precisely, this state of consciousness or true grace, which, in the sage, harmonises with the fruitful duality of Love and Knowledge—the source of the constant desire for improvement.

□

Let us now note, on the final page of our Silent Book, the exhortatory statement presented there, inscribed twice on banners, by way of conclusion; a farewell formula that would be steeped in bitter irony and might even reveal a stern sense of humour, were it not for the fact that it unequivocally affirms the didactic power—both rich and generous—of a book which, more than any other, presents the harsh appearance of impenetrability:

‘OCCULATUS ABIS!’
You depart, clairvoyant one

From Latin to French, the anagram of Jacobus Sulat is evident; he is the holder of the privilege granted by Louis XIV for the first edition:

“…at Saint-Germain, on the twenty-third of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and sixty-six.”

DU LEGS

Published by La Fairrs

TO THE READER

Although the person who bore the costs of the first printing of this book, for personal reasons, did not wish to preface it with any dedication or preface, I have nevertheless felt nevertheless, that it would not be entirely inappropriate to say just how admirable this work may prove to be: for although it bears the title of 'Silent Book', all the nations of the world—the Hebrews, Greeks, Latins, French, Italians, Spaniards, as well as the Germans, etc.—can read and understand it thoroughly.

Moreover, it is the most beautiful of all the books ever printed on this subject to date, for, as the wise often say, there are certain things in it that have never been spoken of by anyone. One need only be a true Son of Art to know this in advance. Here, then (dear readers), is all that I have felt it my duty to tell you.

MUTUS LIBE R IN QUO TAMEN
tota Philosophia herme tica, figuris hieroglyphicis
depingitur, ter optimo maximo Deo misericordi
consecratus, solisque filiis artis dedicatus,
authore cujus nomen est Altus.
21·11·82·Neg·
93·82·72·Neg·
82·81·33·Jud·
RVPELLÆ
apud PETRVM SAVOVRET * cum Priuilegio Regis
M·DC·LXXVII·

This first plate is also the title page, the main subject of which is the deeply sleeping figure who, in that final quarter of the seventeenth century, revives the prophetic dream of the patriarch Jacob, in the days of Genesis. Beatific, our hero smiles in his inner vision, in imitation of Isaac's son, his head resting upon
the stone that serves as his pillow, and from which the Latin dative **'Rupellae'** (in La Rochelle), situated just below the knot that holds the two sturdy rose branches together,
aptly reminds us that this is no ordinary stone.

Derived definitively from 'rupes', the rock, 'rupella' once again takes on the meanings of the noun from which it originated, given the reduction of the things designated, within the alchemist's microcosm, that is to say, to the proportions of laboratory materials; consequently, 'rupella' signifies not only a small rock, a stone, but also the small mountain, the grotto, the tiny cavern, which Limojon de Saint-Didier's *Le Triomphe Hermétique* shows us on the frontispiece and which accompanies the legend taken from the Seven Treatises or Golden Chapters of Hermes Trismegistus:

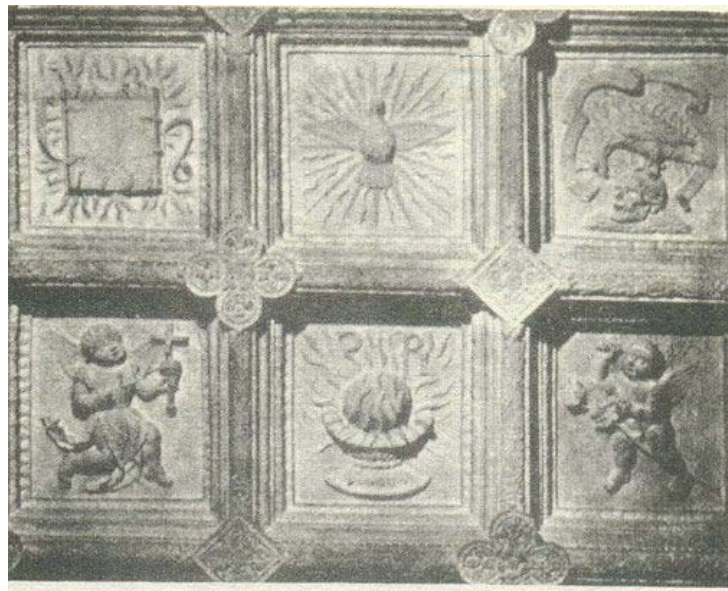
> 'Understand, then, and receive the Gift of God, and keep it hidden from all the ignorant. It is hidden in the caverns of metals; it is a venerable stone, resplendent in colour, a sublime spirit, and an open sea.'
>
> 'Intelligite ergo & donum Dei accipite, & ab omnibus insipientibus celate. De cavernis metallorum occultus est, qui lapis est venerabilis, colore splendibus, mens sublimis, & mare patens." (*Septem Tractatus seu Capitula Hermetis Trismegisti Aurei*. Printed in Strasbourg by Samuel Emmel, in the year 1561, Chapter I)

It is not without a specific purpose that the word 'Rupella', in our illustration, emphasises, in some way, the knot symbolising every difficulty, which must be cut, just as Jean Lallemant did by repeating the feat of Alexander of Macedon with regard to the famous Gordian Knot. Another comparison is essential here, between the two symbols chosen by the alchemist whom the Adept Fulcanelli himself brought out of obscurity, at the same time as the enchanting hotel which, together with that of Jacques Coeur, constitutes the legitimate pride of the ancient capital of Berry. It is indeed worth noting the very close philosophical kinship between the two images used by Jean Lallemant, namely the severed golden knot and the book opened amidst blazing flames. The latter adorns the roof of the Bourges mansion, whilst the former features on the splendid and
precious manuscript preserved in The Hague (Le livre d'Heures de Jean Lallemant).
An emblem that gave rise to malicious gossip, and even slander, being vented with great vehemence. It was seen as the cynical expression of the dishonest sentiments of the merchant, who had replaced the alchemist in history; his brutal greed driving him

to conclude his business deals and his unscrupulous determination, even to the point of burning his account books.

Lallemant's severed golden knot is the struck rock or the split earth of esoteric texts, whether sacred or profane; it is also the stone of Altus and Jacob, and, more expressively, that of Jean de Roquetaillade, a 14th-century Franciscan alchemist, better known by the name of Joannes de Rupescissa – the separated rock.

Formulas that allegorise the liquefaction of matter at the beginning of the Great Work, precisely the separation of light from darkness through the intervention of iron, which, with the aid of fire, opens the great book of Nature, as depicted by the Adept of Berry, without a coat of arms, on the ornate ceiling of his unusual oratory. (See Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*, Paris, Jean Jacques Pauvert, Plate XLV). Jean Lallemant, in the miniatures of his volume preserved in the Netherlands, depicts it as it is before the violent operation, sealed with seven seals, and bearing, on its cover, the
enigmatic formula: 'Delear prius': let me be destroyed first. He is situated in both instances at the centre of the scene, near the alchemist and the cross, which is the sign
of his crucible.



XLV. MANSIÓN LALLEMANT — TECHO DE LA CAPILLA
(Fragmento.)

But let us return to our first engraving, figurative beyond all possibility, which illustrates with the power of poetry itself the precise definition proposed by the alchemist of the word, Philéas Lebesgue, our dearly missed friend, and which, as early as 1911, surprisingly foreshadowed the fundamental legacy of future Surrealism:

> 'The art I envisage could be loved by the masses, as cathedrals were, as music still is in that respect; for it is capable of following the beating of the human heart; art springs from the ceaseless endeavour that seeks to harness all the energies of the planet; it is curious, passionate, reckless, brimming with enthusiasm, and resistant to any definitive crystallisation.' (Essai on the Expansion of an Aesthetic. Inspiration. 1911)

We shall find our character once more lost in sleep, upon his rough bed of rock, of which – following the example of the Masters who insist that mercury is the artisan behind their work – Magophon says it embodies matter, that is to say, the subject of the Work. This, moreover, led the first commentator on the *Mutus Liber* to immediately raise the very serious question: What is the subject? He answered it as best he could, with the customary evasion typical of all authors:

> 'Some say it is a body; others claim it is water. Both sides are correct, for a water called 'The Silver Beauty' flows from that body which the Sages call the Fountain of the Lovers of Science. This ' ' is ' ' the ' ' mysterious ' ' 'selago' (selage) of the Druids, the substance that provides salt (from 'sel', meaning salt, and 'agere', to produce).'

Next comes the statement by which Pierre Dujols, a descendant of the Valois, in accordance with unanimous Tradition, encapsulates the physical Truth in a single sentence, just as Fulcanelli did at greater length a few years later, and just as we ourselves have just done:

> 'For us,' (Magophon continues, on this fourth page of his *Hypotypose*), 'he who succeeds in splitting the rock with the rod of Moses – and this is no idle remark – has found the first operative key.'

On this point, we must state unequivocally that he is referring to a mineral which lends itself particularly well to this miracle.

Let the disciple, however, retain all his prudence at this point; the warning resolutely set out by Fulcanelli over some five pages, on the occasion of the very same problem, may well conceal nothing more than the intention of depriving the unworthy of the benefit of a solid, secure and easily accessible foundation.

acquisition. It is very important to read and reflect on the lengthy passage in the chapter devoted to
Louis d'Etissac, which brings this brief kabbalistic commentary to a singular conclusion:

> 'Written with episemon, **ΣIMMI**, stimmi, it is no longer the stibnite of mineralogists but rather a substance signed by nature, or rather a movement, dynamism or vibration, life sealed (**Σ-IMMENAI**) in order to allow man to identify with it, a signature that is entirely particular and subject to the rules of the number six. ' Fulcanelli, *Les Demeures Philosophales*, Paris, Jean Jacques Pauvert.

Indeed, a first operation is required, one that justifies our Master's final and corrective argument, which transforms common antimony into philosophical antimony and converts lead into the Saturn of the Sages. We might justly reclaim for our own benefit the words of old Dujols, and declare that, from confidence, we ourselves have almost strayed into reprehensible disclosure.

Let us insist on this, however. What chemistry lacks, in contrast to alchemy—that is to say, to proud and soulless analysis— as opposed to humble and living synthesis, is constant communion with the universal, the repeated intermingling of spirit with matter, which the sage Altus depicted, on the frontispiece of his album, through the ascents and descents of his two angels, between heaven and earth, upon the ladder of the philosophers. Repeated sublimations beneath the sky of the sages, upon which we shall dwell later, and the number of which is already marked out in the night sky by ten beautiful stars.

Undoubtedly, the Adept referred to Jacob's famous dream in order to draw the neophyte's attention, too, to the important role played by dew in the Work of Wisdom. In this regard, we have already stated, amongst other things, that the letters and numerals situated to the left and below the Latin title must be read in the opposite direction to the usual order; on this point, our previous work may be consulted with benefit (Alchimie. Paris, Jean Jacques Pauvert).

Alas, one must acknowledge that, whilst awake, despite all appearances, man usually sleeps so deeply that the blare of all the trumpets of the angels in heaven would not suffice to awaken him to an accurate perception of earthly matters. From another perspective, in the operative realm, it is no less true that the subject of the Art—our chosen mineral—is also plunged into a slumber very close to death, and must undergo a violent shock of waves, for which the cry, the clamour and the shrill sound of brass instruments provide a perfect symbolic expression.

In the same way, the sleeper of Altus will be roused by the sound of the trumpets, just as Sethon was, at the end of the first part of his Parable, by the mighty cry of the god Saturn:

> 'But he (Saturn) cried out in a loud voice, so that he roused me from my sleep; for this reason I could ask him no more.'
>
> 'At ille sublata voce clamavit, ut me e somno excitaret, ideo non amplius poteram quaerere.' *Novum Lumen Chymicum*.

An anonymous adept refers, at the beginning of his treatise, the allegorical dream with which he was rewarded 'in the year of grace 1588 of the reign of Henry III, King of France and Poland, and on the twelfth day of May, when the whole populace was in revolt and had taken up arms in a most perilous situation within the city of Paris, where I had my residence with my entire family'. He instructs us on the dual nature of a highly expressive trumpet, at once fiery and glassy—that is to say, saline—whilst, of course, playing on the Kabbalistic association between 'glass' and 'green' (verre and vert in French correspond in the phonetic Kabbalah), which is the colour of this dynamism, of this vibration noted by Fulcanelli:

> 'I saw a man in a black cloak enter; he held a flame of fire in his right hand and a glass trumpet in his left… and as soon as he had entered, he set the flame of fire down on the ground and began to sound his
> trumpet." Discourse by an Unknown Author on the Philosopher's Stone, 16th century.

'This Word comes from God, borne by the angels, the messengers of fire,' asserts Magophon, who quite rightly points out that the Great Work is a true form of celestial agriculture. Let us add that this, even more so than labour in the fields, remains subject to all the elements, and, in particular, to the sovereign influence of the night star. Is it not to this domain that the 'grave contradiction' pointed out by Dujols belongs?

It is certainly hard to imagine that spiritual activity could be triggered and sustained when the moon is in its last quarter. This is why we are inclined to think that it is the crescent at the top right of the print that constitutes the 'uninitiated artist's' error, and that he is at fault for not having turned the horns to the left. For the benefit of science enthusiasts, we shall not fail to point out that the planet of the night nonetheless casts its menstrual tide around itself, and that Manget simply placed it at the centre of a luminous void, pierced through the clouds.

Another definite error is the change in the landscape in which our dreamer lies, which here differs from that of the later edition. In the latter, water stretches out in abundance where, previously, only land reigned as far as the eye could see. Might this abrupt shift from dryness to wetness also be the philosophical anomaly that Magophon alludes to without naming it? :

'The hermetic glosses,' he concludes simply, 'will enlighten the disciple who does not deem it futile to enquire about them.'

Was that sufficient reason for the commentator—an eminent bibliophile, moreover—not to mention, in such a learned *Hypotypose*, the first edition, published in La Rochelle, which he undoubtedly knew of?

Moreover, would it really have been a very serious indiscretion to say that the Work is carried out in two ways; that one is dry and passes through the opaque crucible, whilst the other is wet and passes through the transparent flask; that Manget preferred the second and that, on the title page of the *Mutus Liber*, he replaced the principal element of the first—that is, the image of the earth—with that of water?

It is true that it would be better not to dwell on this crucial point of science and doctrine, which Altus's plates had already revealed in an unconventional manner, particularly following the *Cosmopolita*. Sendivogius's master clearly indicated, through the twins and the animals of the zodiac, the spring season during
the course of which the marvellous water—called by Magophon the 'silver beauty'—is drawn from the moon's rays, 'a radiis lunae **trahebatur**', and, again according to the *Cosmopolitan*, reserved for the nymph Venus of the philosophers' grove.

> 'In this very place, bulls and rams were grazing, and there were two young shepherds whom the alchemist questioned.'
>
> "Ibi etiem pscebantur tauri & arietes, & pastores erant duo iuvenes, quos alchimista interrogans" De Sulphure

This Pontic water comes from the air, from the R (playing on the assonance in French
between 'air' (air) and the letter R, both pronounced as **'er'**) which is rejected, in
an unusual leap of the letter, to the right of the scale, in the long title phrase, and which keenly piques the curiosity of any inquisitor of science. Such a person knows how accustomed the alchemists were to this sort of kabbalistic acrobatics, which consists of extracting the secret meaning of language through phonetic resemblance, which always conceals the ordinary pronunciation. Nor is it without reason that our Adept has written the five words of his first line in capital letters:

‘MUTUS LIBE R IN QUO TAMEN’

which must be read – taking ‘inquo’ for ‘inquio’ – in the manner of an anagrammatic riddle:

‘SUM BETULI R INQUO TAMEN’
I am the air of the betyl, yet I speak.

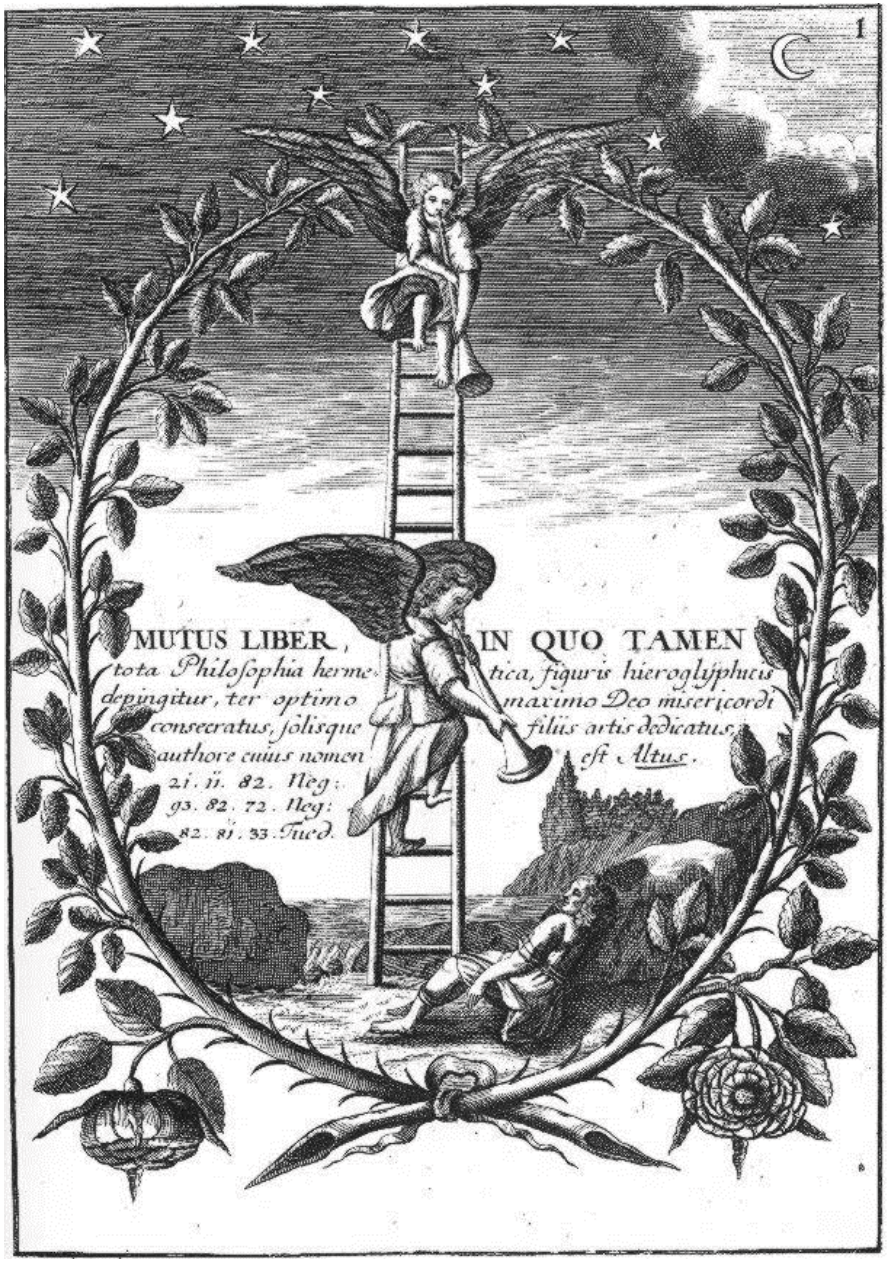
According to the ancient authors, the air is mercury, and the betyl, for Altus, corresponds to Jacob’s bethel, which in Hebrew means ‘the house of God’:

‘And trembling with awe: “How dreadful,” said (Jacob), “is this place! It is none other than the house of God and the gate of Heaven.”’

The betyl is identified with the stone that fell from the sky, which devoured Saturn and possesses the dual virtue of oracle and divination. It can be seen—rough-hewn at first, then multiplied and carved—in emblems XII and XXXVI, amongst the fifty that Jean-Théodore de Bry engraved in sinuous lines for Michaelis Maierus’s *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618).

Emblem XII

Emblem XXXVI

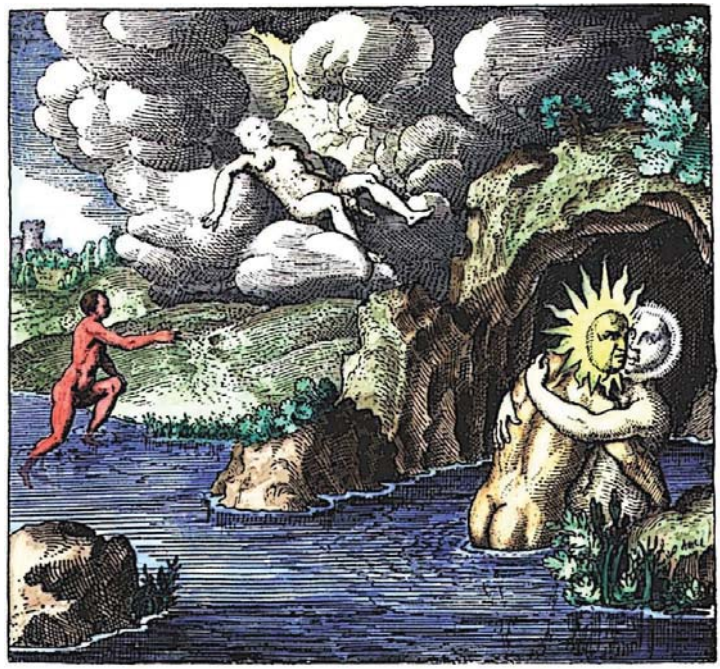

1
MUTUS LIBER,
tota Philosophia hermetica, figuris hieroglyphicis depingitur, ter optimo maximo Deo misericordi consecratus, solisque filiis artis dedicatus, authore cuius nomen est Altus.
21. ii. 82. Neg:
93. 82. 72. Neg:
82. 81. 33. Fued.

Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber Plate II

It is clear that Pierre Dujols is correct in pointing out that this image is out of place. Several of the following should precede it, right up to the eighth, to which it is directly related and which it therefore precedes in its allegory of the intermediate phase, where Neptune protects the sun and the moon in their infancy, with a view to bringing them together for the generative union of the philosophical mercury. It is an inescapable law of nature that generation takes place entirely within the waters, in a completely enclosed and dark place.

In obstetrics, is it not simply referred to as 'the waters' to denote the fluids in which the human foetus is immersed? Michael Maier does not hesitate to show us, in his emblem XXXIV, the copulation of the sun and moon of the sages in the pure water of a cavern, adding, with regard to the philosopher's child, that it is conceived in the baths – 'in balneis concipitur'.



The two noble luminaries of the alchemical microcosm are here represented by the handsome Apollo and the most chaste Diana, that is to say by the sun and the moon, which, on the operational plane, must not be confused with gold and silver, the most precious of the seven metals. These are victims of the death they have suffered at the very moment of the alchemical process, whilst the young, deified couple presented to us by Altus brings together the two mighty sovereigns of the philosophical universe

*[*Mythology, its gods and heroes, like the religion of Christ, the apostles and the Gospel narratives, have no solid explanation or real significance other than in the undeniable and numerous connections they share with alchemy, its materials and its operations. Dom Antoine Joseph Pernety, a Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Saint-Maur, successfully undertook this difficult exegesis, which, in two twododecimo volumes, saw two successive editions (1758 and 1786) that are now extremely rare. Here is the title of this important work, which owes much to the *Fortuita* by Jacobus Tollius—mistaken by some, as noted above, for the physician from La Rochelle—

Les Fables égiptiennes et grecques dévoilées & réduites au même principe, avec explications des Hiéroglyphes et de la Guerre de Troie.

Mythological polytheism allows alchemical authors to deviate from the path leading to the Stone far more freely than was permitted by the linear monotheism of Christian Revelation and the mystery of the Cross.

Thus the mysterious, hidden and shadowy Leto gives birth to the chaste Diana, and the Black Virgin (Virgo paritura – about to give birth) yields her place to the White Virgin, the Immaculate One*]*.

They were born together, to live and reign from then on, like the two great celestial bodies of the cosmos, within the immense sphere that encompasses the mantle of the stars. The world-egg in which the celestial bodies gravitate is the perfect model of the alchemists' retort, within which the planets pass, in the same order, through their orbits, according to Ptolemy's system.

In the *Journal des Sçavans* of August 1677, it is stated that the two noble metals ferment and open up within this egg, 'by the salt of nitre extracted from common salt, which is very fixed, represented by a dolphin, from which this Neptune rises'. 'This volatile nitre salt, which is the universal agent of the Philosophers and which contains its salt, its sulphur and its mercury, is stimulated by the gentle, moist heat of the vapour bath over a lamp flame, as can be seen in the lower part of this very plate.'

This is a view that is a little too spagyric for our liking. The student must be convinced that the mineral of which Fulcanelli and we ourselves have frequently spoken is the chaos indispensable to the creation of the little alchemical world. There is nothing but this body; it is iron that opens it and

the nails that crucify it; the salt that awakens the passions, stimulates them and soothes them—nothing else serves in the Great Work, or, more precisely, is introduced into the compound under formation and, above all, remains within it. From this chaos, the artist draws forth light, like the biblical God on the first day of Creation, the extraordinary week of which Moses described in his book of Genesis:

> 'And God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.'

A primordial light, reflected by the philosophers' mercury, which we recognise in our image in the figure of Neptune seated upon the rocky, shifting mass of the island of Delos. The god of the seas has caused it to rise under the blows of his trident, and it now emerges, carried by the dolphin that swims on the surface of the waters above which, in their youth, the sun and the moon rise—the future parents of our alchemical child.

Alexander Sethon himself identified the mirror of Nature with the sea god who, in a second dream, appears once more to the fortunate alchemist and leads him to an island more beautiful than the Elysian Fields. This is what the Adept—who is far better known by the name of Cosmopolitan—expresses in the Parable or the Philosophical Enigma, which follows, added here to complete and conclude the book: sequitur Parabola seu Aenigma philosophicum, coronidis & super additamenti loco adiunctum:

> 'He rejoiced in the bliss present in the Gardens of the Hesperides, showing me a mirror in which I saw all of nature laid bare.'

> 'Praesentem in Hortis Hesperidum consagranulur felicitate(m), mostrando mihi speculum, in quo totam Naturam detectam vidi.'
> Novum Lumen Chymicum.

That which was hidden is revealed, becomes evident, as indicated by the word Delos, **Δήλος**, an epithet for the island that enabled and promised the birth of Apollo, as well as that of Diana, then called Artemis, from artemes, meaning 'safe and sound'. To anyone who might doubt that our philosophical island can remain afloat upon the waves, we would remind them of the rebuke Jesus addressed to Peter, which the unknown Adept of Dampierre-sur-Boutonne depicted in one of the sculptures on his marvellous ceiling. There we see a cubic stone floating upon the calm waters:

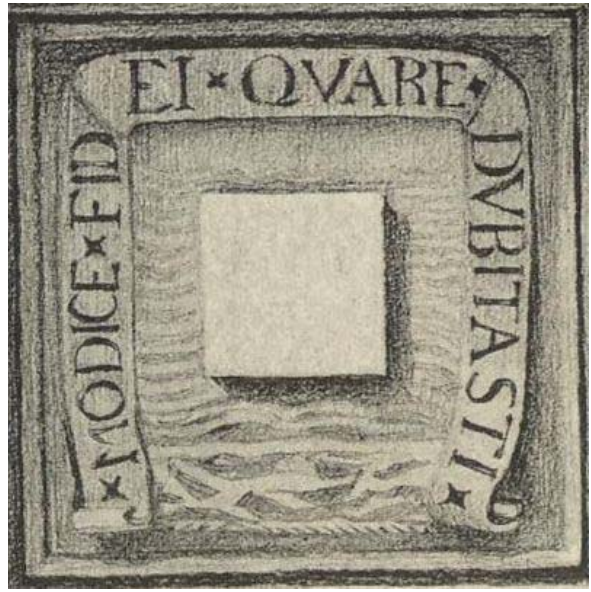


Illustration by Jean Julien Champagne

'MODICE. FIDEI. QVARE. DVBITASTI.'
'Why did you doubt, you of little faith?'

"It is from this," writes Fulcanelli, "from this steadfast faith, that the wise craftsman will draw the virtues indispensable to the resolution of this great mystery. The term is no exaggeration: we are, in fact, faced with a genuine mystery, both because of its behaviour, which runs counter to the laws of chemistry, and because of its obscure mechanism—a mystery that even the most learned scholar and the most skilled alchemist would be unable to explain. So much so that nature, in its simplicity, seems to take pleasure in presenting us with enigmas before which our logic falters, our reason is thrown into confusion, and our judgement is led astray."
The Philosophical Dwellings

In our capacity as the sole disciple of the last Adept of his time, and as a Brother Knight of Heliopolis, we were a frequent witness to—and later a seasoned practitioner of—the operative phase we are examining here. That is why we advise you to bear firmly in mind that the island of Delos is a refuge whose mythological origin, in the heart of the ocean, very precisely expresses the physical-chemical phenomenon which, through the mercurial solvent, elevates and fixes there, on the surface, the sulphurous and igneous principle of the underlying terrestrial magma.

It is the elevation of the spirit, of the philosophical gold of which 'The Rising Dawn', having quoted Morien, clearly concludes (ex hoc patet) that it is not common gold common sort, neither in colour nor in substance' – 'quod aurum philosophicum non est aurum vulgo,
nec in colore, nec in substantia, in *Aurora consurgens*.

A phase symbolised by the sun, and by the angels standing upon the convex shore of the mercurial ocean, and which demands numerous manipulations—at once delicate, laborious and arduous—which present themselves to the artist as an opportunity to prove his courage and tenacity. In the course of these tedious repetitions, perseverance in work and effort is far more essential than invocation and prayer. The old adage remains the principal rule, to which the philosopher must ceaselessly adhere:

'Help yourself, and heaven will help you.'

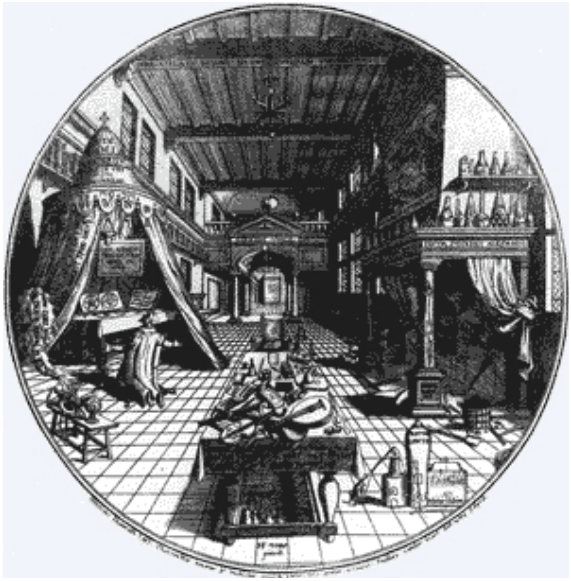
Prayer alone is sufficient, but if it precedes action or accompanies it, the result sought may exceed all hope. This is a fundamental concept that Jacob Sulat wished to convey by depicting, beneath the hieroglyph of the alchemical process, the alchemist and his wife, kneeling and praying, on either side of the gently rotating athanor.

Similarly, Henri Khunrath, on the first plate of his *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* (*Amphitheatrum Eternae Sapientiae*), had himself depicted absorbed in prayer and kneeling before the altar erected near his furnace.

Moreover, it is fitting that Magophon should conclude the passage he devoted to the second plate of Altus's beautiful album:

'The artist's prayer is, above all, work—persistent work, often arduous, dangerous and incompatible with hands that are too delicate. One must rely, above all, on improbus labor.'

For Dujols, the key is to use the required materials, and not to fall into the trap set by the Kermes oak that he recognises growing on the rock in the title page. Although the illustration, in both Altus and Manget, does not provide indisputable evidence of the dwarf oak typical of the French Midi, this interpretation is tempting, as it evokes the misconception that once prevailed regarding antimony, which we sought to dispel in our commentary on the first and seventh figures.



Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 3

The third engraving provides detail and a complement to the one we have just seen. This time it is circular and presents its concentric circles against the seething immensity of the waves – uniformly transformed by Manget into clouds – between the sun and the moon, under the mighty aegis of Jupiter, perched upon his Eagle, whose tufted head appears to be that of the Phoenix. The sovereign of the gods sits on high, in the bosom of the Empyrean which the Geneva physician identified with the Cimmerian shadows, positioned there halfway down the page, at the level of the two celestial bodies that illuminate the earth in turn.

Regarding the two great luminaries of the heavens, and their inestimable virtues, which contribute to a healthy existence on earth, Alexander Sethon, known as the Cosmopolitan, denounces the inconceivable weakness of men who, for the most part, pass from inattention acquired through habit to the forgetfulness that slowly takes root in subjection:

> ‘In this holy and most true science, he for whom the sun does not shine finds himself in the darkness of night; he for whom the moon does not appear at night is in thick darkness.’
>
> ‘In hac sancta & verissima scientia, in nocturnis versatur tenebris, cui sol non lucet, in densa umbra este cui de nocte non apparet.’
> Novum Lumen chymicum.

Taken as a whole, the composition illustrates what Dujols states in his *Hypotipose*, namely that the symbols established by Altus are described, in a general sense, in the *Major Work* of Irenaeus Filaleteus. Although we believe that the Cosmopolitan, too, strongly inspired Altus’s work, we must acknowledge that the observation is not without accuracy, as is the qualification that follows:

> ‘It is not that there is nothing more to add. Far from it; on the contrary. Filaleteo’s practice, presented under a pleasant and persuasive guise, ranks among the most subtle and most treacherous fictions of Hermetic literature. It nevertheless contains the truth, just as poison sometimes conceals its antidote, if one knows how to isolate it from its dangerous alkaloids.’

Magophon then promised to point out these ambushes and traps as they arose—a promise of which we have found no trace whatsoever to suggest it was ever fully kept. No doubt for this very purpose, our readers will be grateful to us for bringing to their attention the words of the anonymous philosopher in *De Regimine Jovis* (*On the Regime of Jupiter*), which appear to be precisely the subject of the present paradigm:

> ‘Black Saturn is succeeded by Jupiter, which is of a different colour. For after the inevitable putrefaction and the completion of the conception at the bottom of the vessel, by God’s command, you will see changing colours and the sublimation circulating once more. This regime is not long-lasting; it lasts no more than three weeks. During this time, every imaginable colour will appear, for which no certain explanation can be given. Rainfall will increase during this period, and finally, after all these things, a most beautiful whiteness will be revealed to the eye, resembling streaks or strands of hair on the sides of the vessel.”

For the alchemist who has experience of the dry method in the furnace—and who, above all, has an excellent theoretical understanding of it—it is easy to recognise, in Filaleteo’s account, the deliberate conflation of the two methods, the wet and the dry, even though the period of twenty-one days appears very modest in relation to the demands of the method carried out in the flask; no one who has practised the phase illustrated by Figures II and III in Sulat will contradict our assertion that this series of operations, though very lengthy, requires little more than a week for two kilograms of material used.

The heat of the hearth must be sufficiently intense to ensure that the three parts of the compound, which occupy the space between the outer circle and the second, react with one another. At the top, Juno, recognisable by her bridal veil—that is, the goddess who pursued Leto—emerges from the eleventh plate, evoking the famous eagles of Philaleteus and symbolising sublimation. For this operation, which follows putrefaction—that is, the raven or the colour black—on the path of the crucible, the English adept encourages the neophyte:

> ‘II
> Rejoice, then, for you have successfully completed the regime of Jupiter. Great prudence is required in this regime, so that the young ravens, having left their nest, do not return to it.
>
> Likewise, so that, in this way, you do not use up the water without measure, so that the remaining earth does not lack it and is not left, at the bottom, barren and useless.

Thirdly, so that you do not water the soil so excessively that you suffocate it. Against all these errors, proper management of external heat will protect you.'

'Rejoice, then, for you have successfully completed Jupiter's regime. Exercise the utmost caution in this regime.
Do not let the young crows, having left their nest, return to the same one.
Irem, lest you draw water so immoderately that the earth, sinking, may be left barren and useless at the bottom.
Thirdly, do not irrigate your land so excessively that you completely suffocate it. May good management of external heat provide a remedy for these combined errors." Philalethae, Introitus

Behind Jupiter's wife, a peacock – often his attribute – spreads its tail and displays the marvellous colours of its plumage, which mirror those of our perfectly fused glass. A phenomenon of the Work, a meteor in the sky of the wise, which ancient authors called the peacock's tail, in comparison with the iridescent patterns of the aristocratic bird. Similarly, in the crucible of the dry path, the tinted meshes of the circular net shimmer, illuminated from below in varying ways like the great rose window of a cathedral—which was also called 'rota' (the wheel)—and which kisses the setting sun.

This is that subtle net which our master, following the example of the ancient philosophers, advises us to use 'to capture the product as it appears'. (Les Demeures Philosophales)

One will notice this fishing gear, also known as an 'esparavell' (the 'esparaván', like the eagle, was in ancient times a noble bird, whose lower limbs, like those of the horse, are always referred to as 'legs' and 'feet'. It was also the attribute of noblewomen) which a bare-chested woman dips into the water with her right hand, whilst, with her left, she holds the indispensable lantern on her knees. She looks at a man sitting on the ground just as she is, who makes her understand, by raising his index finger, that only one fish is needed, and consequently the simple fishing rod he has cast is sufficient to catch it.

Gliding upon the black wave, a mermaid moves with grace; it is now fitting for her to revisit the explanation that Fulcanelli provided us in the past regarding the symbolic relationship between this hybrid being and the second, difficult and monotonous phase of the great work:

> ‘Thus the mermaid, a fabulous monster and hermetic symbol, serves to characterise the union of nascent sulphur—which is our fish—and common mercury, known as the “virgin”, into philosophical mercury or the salt of wisdom.’

The hermetic fish is often the dolphin which, in our illustration, the pair of alchemists have thus managed to catch with a hook from a boat held in place and guided by Neptune himself, who is also directing the three iron prongs of his trident so that the two fishermen in dispute may come to an agreement.

Perched above the central scene and watching in admiration, a charming, solitary creature—elegant even in her simple attire—holds, in honour of the brave fishermen, the two bunches of flowers destined for the future cooking of the royal cetacean. Presented in a vase, one must imagine them in varied hues; these flowers appear to be artificial and number six in total, with the black one containing them all. They symbolise the planets, whilst the metals—of which only five, capable of perfection, open their corollas—stand firmly on the ground, upon the same mighty stem, beside a seductive damsel.

A very important question, one to which we shall have to respond on numerous occasions, is raised by the repeated presence, in Altus’s iconography, of the ram and the bull—here, for the first time, in the second crown formed by the three concentric circles. Pierre Dujols, with regard to these animals, did not hesitate to put forward a claim which we shall examine in connection with the following figure and which, we must point out from the outset, is clearly contradictory in nature.

In relation to this problem and the interpretation of the present image, is it generally understood that clouds arise from the precipitation (moisture) or the reduction (dryness) of the waves that traverse the atmosphere? This phenomenon arises from the free interplay of the moon and the sun, which must not be altered in either direction—towards a decrease or an increase. Alchemy reveals, moreover, that a profound disturbance of the magnetic fluid harms the small central sun of the chemical entity, and, by analogy, the same atmospheric disorder places the heart of the human entity in grave danger. It also demonstrates that clouds hinder the descent of the cosmic spirit upon the earth, especially when they cover the entire firmament in a thick layer. The same obstacle arises with regard to dew, according to a short treatise in which the author records, in no uncertain terms, his experiences and observations:

> ‘If, in the course of a night, the weather changes from calm and clear to windy and overcast, not only will the formation of dew cease, but any dew that existed previously will either disappear or diminish considerably.’ Wells (William Charles), Essai sur la Rosèe.

Manget's 1702 edition

Mutus Liber, Plate 4

The fourth plate clearly reveals one of the greatest mysteries of the physical work.

The cosmic influence, in an immense fan of straight bands, alternately striped and speckled, descends from the centre of the heavens, from a point situated between the sun and the moon.

No author has so candidly identified the principal agent of movement and transformation, both on the surface and at the centre of the earth. It is precisely the intervention of this cosmic agent that distinguishes alchemy from chemistry, which is proudly empirical and parallel. The secret is revealed to such an extent that Magophon undoubtedly made a great effort to conceal it when he finished writing these few, yet highly significant, lines:

> 'Without the aid of heaven, man's labour is in vain. Trees are not grafted nor grain sown in every season. Everything in its own time. The Philosophical Work is called Celestial Agriculture, and not without reason; one of the greatest authors has signed his writings with the name Agricola, and two other excellent adepts are known by the names of the Great Farmer and the Little Farmer.'

Well then! Indeed, the lamb and the bull in the image, over which we now pause, correspond to the two zodiacal signs—that is to say, to the spring months during which the operation, whose aim is to gather the flower of heaven, is carried out exactly as set out here.

Following the example of the old masters, Pierre Dujols did not hesitate to show his envy, thus drawing his reader in with a long paragraph which he himself described as 'logomachy', as soon as he had uttered this ambiguous phrase:

> 'We must declare, in good faith, that the Lamb and the Bull in the plate, which are always taken to be the signs of the Zodiac under which the flos coeli must be gathered, bear no relation whatsoever to astrological symbols.'

It is easy to conclude that it is the dew, and nothing else, that the wise Jacob Sulat suggests we gather, and that it would be futile to philosophise too subtly about a figure of almost naive sincerity, on the assumption that it constitutes an

abstruse allegory. It is, quite plainly, the simple method we ourselves employed at the outset, barely half a century ago, save for the difference regarding the way these pieces of cloth are fixed to the stakes—a system which may explain the dryness of the ground in the Altus landscape, although, according to an English doctor, any substance placed above the ground 'will gather more dew during a very calm night than a similar substance laid upon the grass.' (Essai sur la Rosée)

For a long time now, we have been working differently: whilst walking, preferably over green cereals, clover, alfalfa and piripingallos, we lay a linen cloth that has been thoroughly rinsed with rainwater on numerous previous occasions. It is certainly important that no salt whatsoever from the washing and bleaching process, however slight, should dissolve into the rich dew that is to be collected. Similarly, one must be wary that the plant on which the cloth rests has not, unfortunately, been dusted or sprayed with any fertilisers.

The process is simple, and consists of wringing out the fabric once it has been thoroughly saturated, in order to squeeze out and collect the dew, just as the man and woman we saw praying in the second plate are doing. Around the two workers lies the bare ground which, in Manget's work, nourishes plants that unfurl and spread across the earth in large leaves. It is tempting to think that these plants, flattened into peculiar pools, represent the nostoc, of which one often speaks in connection with alchemy, and which was still easy to find until recently, before the disruption of nature had caused it to almost disappear. As for this algae, which is referred to by numerous popular expressions – vox populi, vox Dei – such as 'magic butter', 'the Moon's spittle', 'dew fat', 'flower of the sky', 'spring foam', etc., as for this seaweed, let us quote what Fulcanelli observed before the four leaves of the Virgin's portico in Amiens Cathedral, though this may not have been, strictly speaking, his actual feeling:

> 'Here, we believe, is the place to correct certain errors made concerning a symbolic plant, which, taken literally by ignorant charlatans, contributed greatly to bringing alchemy into disrepute and its supporters into ridicule. We refer to the Nostoc. This cryptogam, known to all country folk, is found everywhere in the countryside, whether on the grass or on bare ground, in fields, by the wayside, or on the edge of woods. Early in the morning in spring, they are found plump, swollen with night-time dew, gelatinous and quivering – hence their name 'tremelas' – they are most often greenish in colour and dry out so quickly under the sun's rays that it becomes impossible to find any trace of them in the very spot where they lay just a few hours earlier." (Le Mystère des Cathédrales)

We have said, and we repeat, that the author of the *Mutus Liber* demonstrated a degree of charity and sincerity that was both incredible and abundant. Could the source and nature of the cosmic and universal agent—which the ancient alchemists even declared to be their 'primary matter'—ever have been expressed with such clarity and force?

It is certain that the small bas-relief at Notre-Dame in Picardy (Le Mystère des Cathédrales) depicts the same fluid, torrential cascade as that in Altus's engraving, with this difference, however: the medieval alchemist appears solitary and transfixed in ecstasy, whilst the couple in our Silent Book are shown engaged in its fullest utilisation. It would certainly be worthwhile for the reader to compare the photograph accompanying the Master's text in his first book with the scene on the fourth plate, which they have ample time to study here.

Illustration by Jean Julien Champagne

For the Adept Fulcanelli, it was by analogy that the authors—the Philosophers—chose 'nostoc' in order to speak more freely about the mineral subject of their philosophical works, as much as they could without the danger of perjury, so as to preserve their

magnesia which absorbs the universal spirit, just as a magnet attracts iron—that is to say, 'green'—from a Kabbalistic perspective. (Due to the assonance in French between 'fer' (iron) and 'vert' (green)) Irenaeus Filaleteo thinks no differently when he bursts into curses against the spagyricists and mocks their use of water that has fallen directly from the sky:

> 'You prepare your salts with rainwater from May… Do you really think I am overcome with sorrow because of your ridiculous talk!'
>
> 'Tractate aquas vestras pluviales, majales, salia vestra,… creditis me hoc vestro turpiloquio tristitia affici!' Introitus

It is quite evident that at this point, the author of the highly renowned *Introitus* considers, just like Fulcanelli, the mysterious body which he was the first to designate as being akin to *magnes* (which means **'magnet'** in both Greek and Latin).

> 'Just as iron is drawn to the magnet and the magnet spontaneously turns towards the iron: so the Magnet of the Sages draws its iron.'
>
> 'Quemadmodum Chalubs ad Magnetem trahitur, Magnesque sporite se ad Chalybem convertit, sic & Magnes Sophorum trahit illorum Chalybem.' Introitus

Seemingly more abstruse, Cyrano de Bergerac emphasises, through allegory, the virtue of sublimation possessed by dew. With his head brimming with a thousand definitions of the moon, 'which he could not bring to light', the philosopher, having taken refuge in the countryside of a remote dwelling, begins his curious endeavour:

> 'I tied a multitude of little vials filled with dew all around me, and the heat of the sun, which drew them to it, lifted me so high that in the end I found myself above the highest clouds.' (The States and Empires of the Moon)

Under the effect of heat applied wisely thanks to its subtle nitre, the dew exalts and ennobles all salt, whatever it may be, and, preferably, those that nature has reserved for the Great Work. In the company of this pair of saline fluxes, the nocturnal condensation undergoes the action of fire easily and without harm; therein lies the secret reason why the members of the Rose Croix (Rose Cross) called one another the brothers of the Rosèe-Cuite (Cooked Dew)

[From *The Cosmopolitan*, which, as we have said, greatly inspired Altus's exquisite iconography, a few lines are worth quoting here as advice to the experimenter:

‘Indeed, you must take that which is, but which is not seen, to the extent that pleases the artist; it is the water of our dew, from which the saltpetre of the Philosophers is extracted, by which all things grow and are nourished.’

‘Id enim accipere debes, quod est, sed non videtur, donec artifici pleceat, est aqua roris nostri, ex qua estrahitur sal petrae Philosophurum, quo omnes res crescunt, & nutriuntur.’]

In a striking connection, here is the passage from the *Journal des Scavans*, whose author consistently displays knowledge far beyond the ordinary level when examining the celestial dew, imbued with fire and solar salt:

‘When this solar salt, which is nothing other than highly purified saltpetre, is concentrated and petrified through skilful preparation, it absorbs light and becomes a small artificial sun. Perhaps this is the perpetual fire of the Urns of the ancients, so celebrated in antiquity and so sought after by moderns… This very same salt, when duly reduced to a liquor, becomes the Alcaest or universal solvent so closely guarded by the Masters of the Art: indeed, experience shows that the volatile salt of May dew dissolves gold as easily as hot water dissolves ice.”

The Anonymous Adept, author of *The Mystery of the Cross*, written in the solitude of Sonnestein ‘on 12 August 1732’, wrote in the concluding verses of his *Little Sacred Garden* (*Hortulus Saccer*) that, of the three uncommon medicines (*Triplex Medicina non Vulgaris*), the green Sophic of the air provides the first, which contains its own fires – Dat priman Sophicum viride **aeris…** In se prima suos ignes habet – : that the second draws to itself the virtues of the heavens, like a magnet – altera virtudes Coeli, magnetis adinstar attrahit – : that the third, finally:

‘And unites the forces of heaven and earth,
by watering, with Heaven’s dew, the salt of the sea,

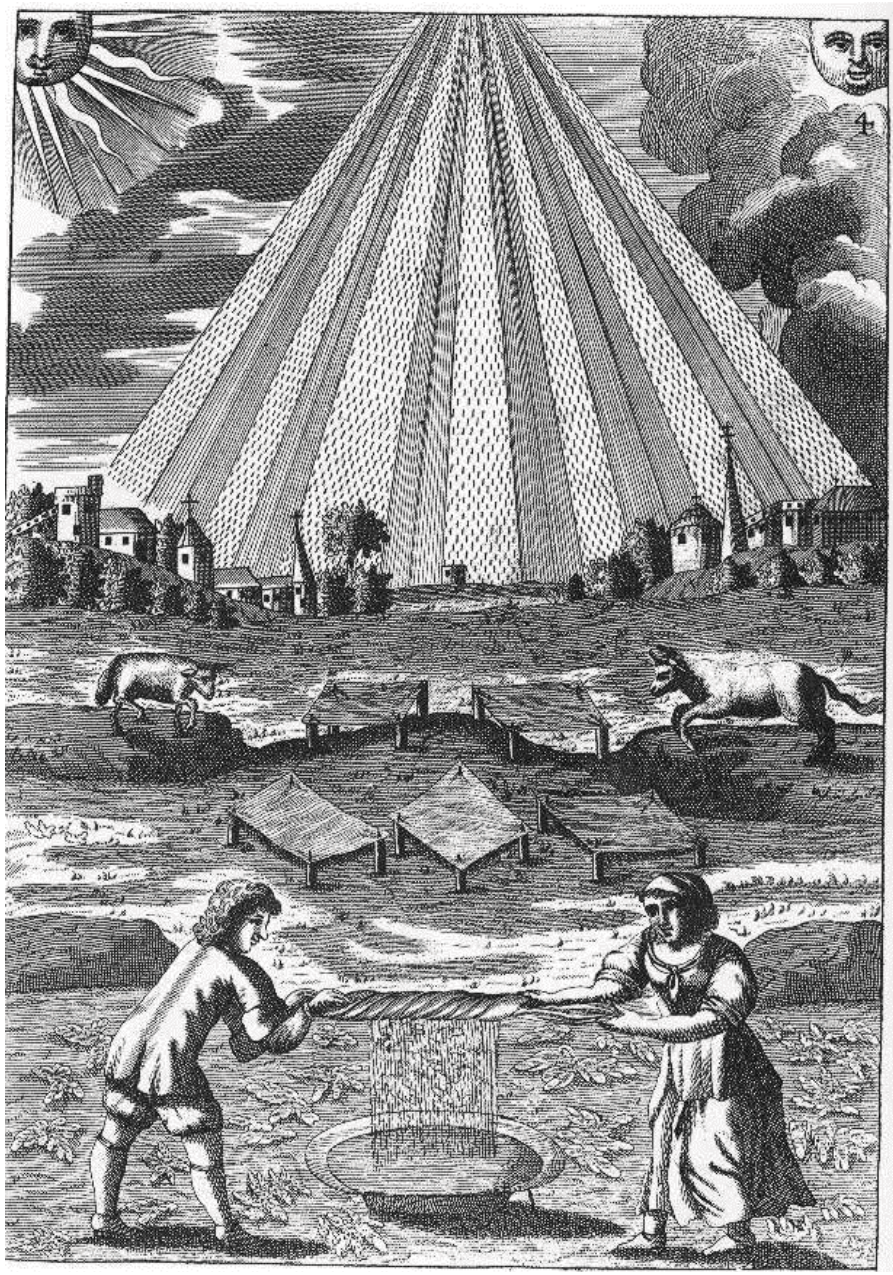
Et Coeli et Terae conjungit tertia vires, a
Equoreum, Coeli rore, rigando salem.’

The attentive observer will certainly have recognised, at the tip of the pointed arrow emerging from the landscape on the right, the Cross of Lorraine, a symbol of ash or of this saline dust, which the authors unanimously agree should not be disregarded:

‘Oh, how precious is this ash to the children of learning, how precious is that which comes from it!

O quam preciosus est cinis iste filiis doctrinae, & quam preciosum est quod ex eo fit!’ (Ait Aziratus in Turba Philosophorum)

The diagram is more precise in Manget’s engraving, in which he has also placed it within the circle symbolising the initial subject.



Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 5

The fifth image takes us into the laboratory, where we recognise our two dew-gatherers, who are now pouring their collection from the large dish in the previous scene into the cucurbit in this one. This rapid sequence of tasks proclaims that the liquid must be used whilst still fresh; for our part, we filter it immediately and meticulously.

Here we are in the presence of that most secret distillation, which we see expressed quite plainly through the various manipulations of the tireless couple. These will show us just how rightly the distiller was also known by the name of 'rosary'.

Above all, let it not be attributed to vanity that we are not afraid to declare our knowledge of most of the classical authors on alchemy to be quite thorough. We state this not without reason, but because it is good for our readers—and especially for our students of the art—to know of our firm resolve to avoid, as far as possible, the subtleties of the language found in the ancient treatises, which we ourselves had to overcome for such a long time.

We know only too well how easy it would be to explain, on the basis of the texts, at length and brilliantly, the designs of the *Mutus Liber*—all the more so as they seem, for the most part, to relate to operations of the wet method. It is this method that the good authors prefer to describe in order to conceal, under the guise of similarity, the dry method which all followed in the preparation of the Stone in the laboratory.

Such was the view of Irenaeus Filaleteo who, in his famous work *The Open Entrance to the King's Closed Palace*, whilst examining the two processes—wet and dry—side by side, recounts to us all the difficulties of the former and his decision never to distinguish it from the latter:

> 'But this path is strewn with a thousand thorns, and we have promised to God and to equity that we shall never, in these plain words, distinguish clearly between the two methods.'
>
> 'At est via mille spinis obsita & nos vovimus Deo & aequitati, quod nudis vervis nunquam declarabimus regimen utrumque distinctim.' *Introitus apertus ad Palatium occlusum Regis*.

The operation is complete, over a fire we surmise to be quite lively, with flames escaping through the vent, and our two operators are preparing: one to lift the cap of the still, the other to remove the vessel which the liquid that has passed through fills to four-fifths of its capacity. A precise proportion which the student—a future practitioner, if not already one—must bear in mind, so that he may perhaps thank the generous Altus first and foremost, and us next.

The distillation has therefore been halted at the very moment when the extremely delicate fraction would itself have been at risk of flowing into the receiving flask. The wife removes this fraction from the cucurbit using a spoon, to place it in a narrow-necked vessel which then reveals, through its transparency, four coagulated particles. She then hands the flask to a man of athletic build, naked, standing upright yet off-balance, his right foot resting on a small raised platform. For Altus, this was a very prudent way of depicting Vulcan, whom everyone knows to have been lame. Wretched husband of Venus—is it not from her, from her very own hands, that he receives the bottle, whilst clutching a lifeless young child to his chest?

It would be a grave mistake to believe that this muscular man is in any way attempting to take the child's life, since, on the contrary, he will later go on to restore it. The Massacre of the Innocents has no place at the outset of the Great Work; the symbolism may seem cruel in our age, where true sensitivity has given way to the most foolish sentimentality, whilst, on the other hand, human life has never been treated with such disregard.

God of fire and the metallurgical arts, Vulcan is the emblem of the most secret agent of the Great Work, of that fiery water which Nicolas Flamel in particular used for his 'washings'. This is why he bears, on his left breast, the crescent moon, which is also depicted in silver against the gules field of the shield on the other side.

Here is a very important detail which reveals that Jacob Sulat was familiar with the treatise—as thin in pages as it is rich in wisdom—entitled *The Ancient War of the Knights, or Dialogue on the Philosopher's Stone, with Gold and Mercury*. This was before Toussaint Limojon de Saint-Didier had produced his edition—undoubtedly the finest—which he enriched by paraphrasing it with the Dialogue of Eudoxius and Pyrophilus, even in his Letter to the True Disciples of Hermes. In Altus's time, in fact, two translations—one Latin and one French—were already in circulation; these were, in truth, mediocre and had been based on the first German edition, published in Leipzig in 1604.

Thus the author of the Silent Book, on the path to adeptship, undoubtedly encountered Lunatic Vulcan, whose character he so discreetly portrayed as the figure marked by the crescent of the horizontally reclining star, like the Ark of the Covenant. This lunar fire is discussed in great detail in the *Dialogue between Mercury and Gold*, which is entirely devoted to the pre-eminent subject that spurred and stimulated all the endeavours of the ancient Knights.

Our reader is, in this respect, more fortunate than Jacob Sulat, for he has at his disposal—as regards the identification of this water-fire, this fire-water, or, to put it better, the secret fire—the invaluable accounts that Limojon de Saint-Didier lavished in his commentary, of which here is a brief yet substantial summary:

> 'All you can reasonably expect from me is for me to tell you that the natural fire of which this philosopher speaks is a fire in potential, which does not burn the hands, but reveals its efficacy the moment it is stimulated, however slightly, by an external fire. It is therefore a truly secret fire, which this author calls 'Vulcan Lunatic' in the title of his work." *Le Triomphe Hermètique* or *La Pierre Philosophale Victorieuse*. Amsterdam 1699.

Monsieur de Saint-Didier, in the manner of Altus and so many others, signed his work with an anagram:

> 'DIVES SICUT ARDENS S; rich as fire, SANCTUS
> DESIDERIUS.'

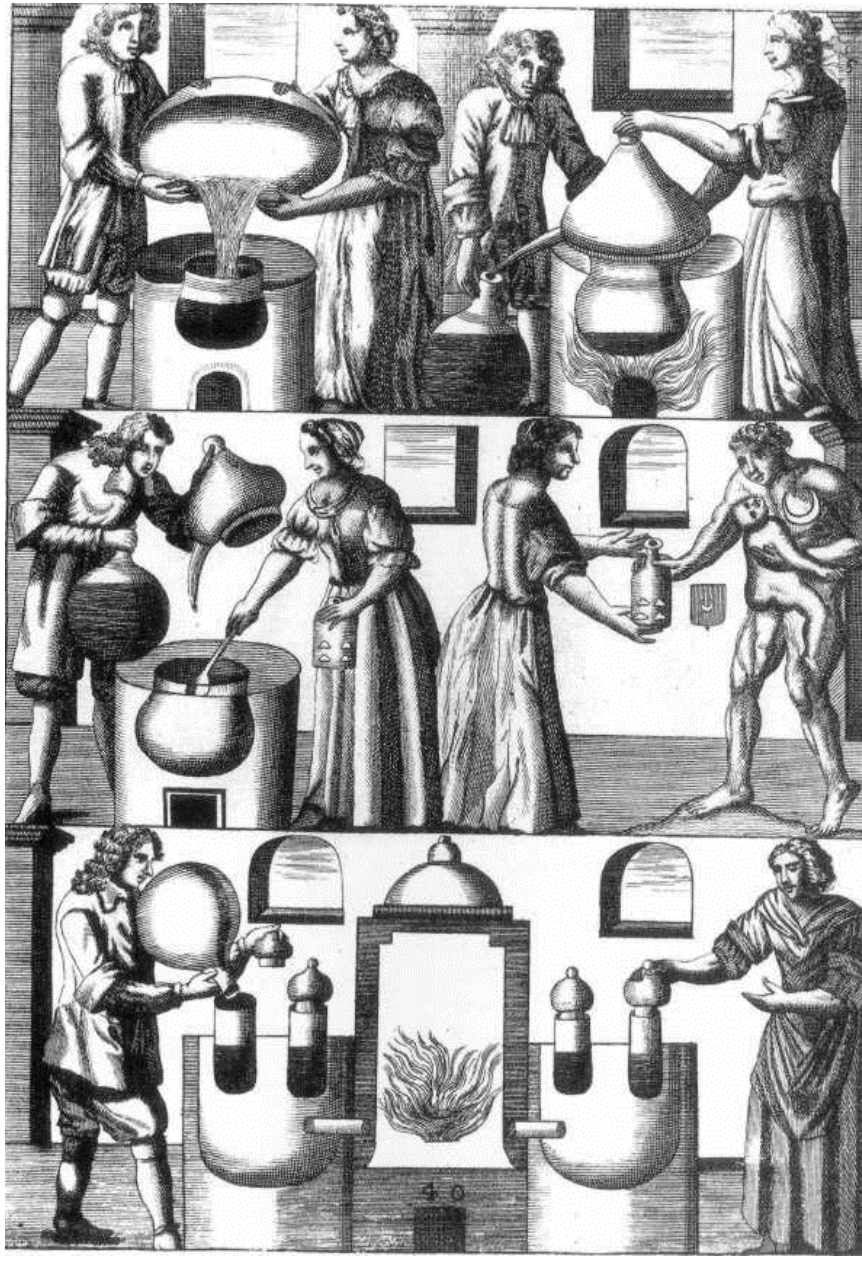
It should be borne in mind that, following the example of Irenaeus Filaleteus, Altus has combined the two paths—the wet and the dry—giving his album the appearance of belonging solely to the former, due to the scope he accords to the philosophical preparation of the salt-working assistants. This is a work of great diligence that lies outside the main text and which, like the wet method, calls for the glassware that the figures in the plates use before our very eyes. This, moreover, demonstrates the superior quality of Altus's iconography, as he resolutely undertook to address, in its entirety, the phase of the Great Work that almost all other authors had either omitted or remained silent about.

We shall continue our study and observe that the contents of the flask, for their part, are divided amongst four small vessels which are then sealed, and subsequently placed in an apparatus designed for slow digestion. This process will last forty days, according to the number inscribed in black just above the ash pan. With regard to this operation, it will be very useful to understand and follow Filaleteo's advice on the management of the fire:

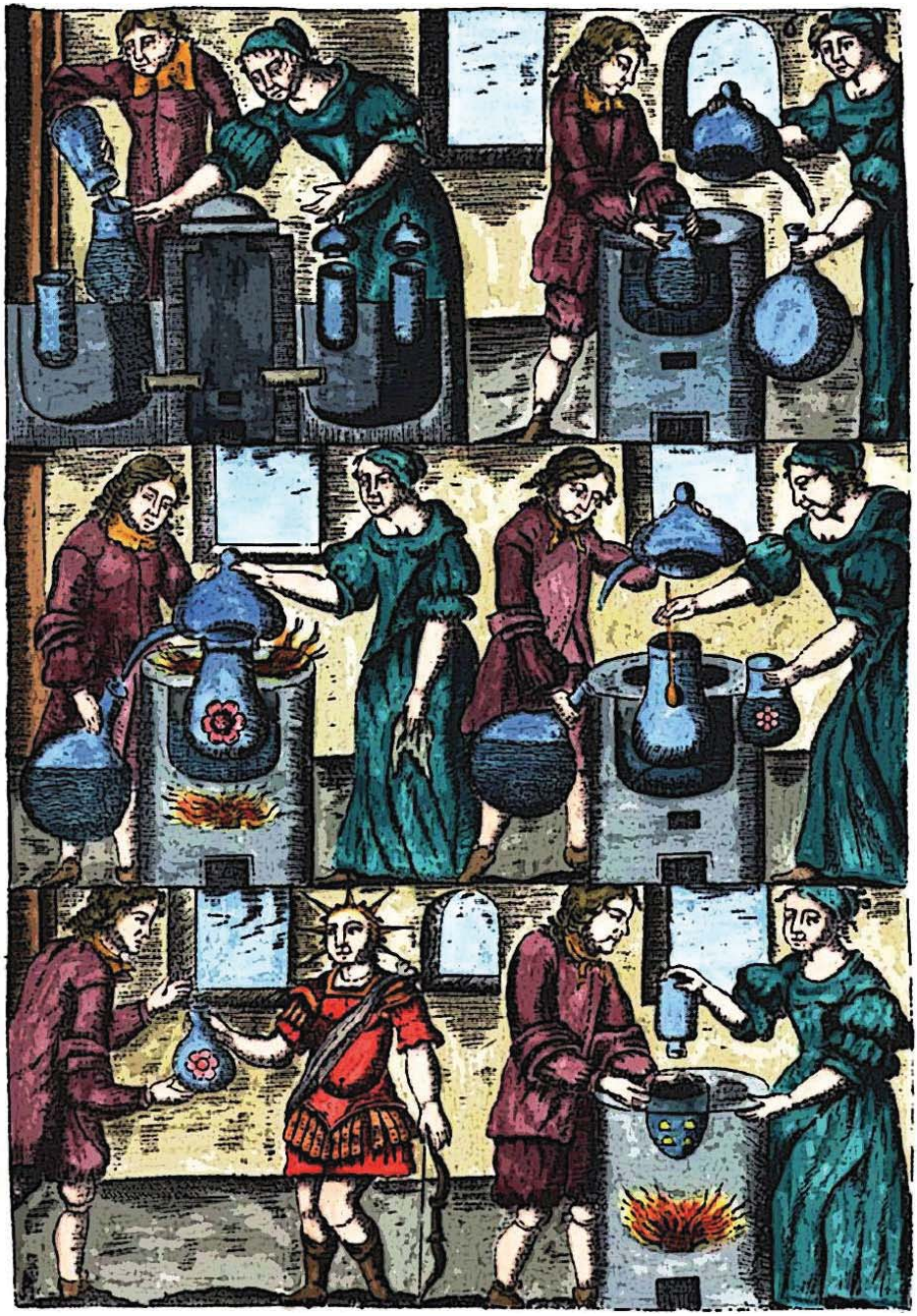
‘At the very least, keep a watchful eye on your fire—which, as you will have understood, must here be managed with sound judgement—and I swear to you, on my word of honour, that if, whilst stoking the fire in this manner, you were to cause anything to sublimate, you would inevitably lose the entire work. Be content, then, with the good Travisano, that the tender matter may be retained for forty days and forty nights at the bottom of the prison that is the nest of conception…’

‘Take care, at the very least, of the fire, which you must here manage with sound judgement, and I swear to you on my honour that if, whilst stoking the fire under this regime, you cause anything to sublimate, you will irretrievably lose the entire work. ‘Be content, therefore, with the good Trevisano, that the tender matter may be held for forty days and forty nights at the bottom of the prison which is the nest of conception…’

Introit



Manget's 1702 version



Mutus Liber
Plate 6

'Plate six is the continuation of the fifth,' tells us Magophon, who is all the more correct in this regard as he observes that 'the operations are always carried out by a man and a woman, symbolising the two natures.'

This is also our view, which is borne out by the rather surprising fact that the pair, as depicted in the illustrations, changes their attire in each one and, moreover, does not always appear to consist of the same two individuals. Certainly, if these are indeed the alchemist and his faithful companion, both of them, in their transformations, emphasise the changes undergone by the two mineral protagonists in the course of the long process.

We have no doubt that Sulat was familiar with the 'way in the crucible', although this earthenware vessel does not appear in any of his fifteen engravings. No one who is thoroughly versed in the Hermetic texts and their highly specialised language can fail to have noticed that no author, however classical, ever deals with the Great Work in its entirety. We are therefore content, alongside Altus, to set out that part of the philosophical labour which no one before him had detailed so meticulously.

To appreciate at its true value what we ourselves owe him, it suffices to state honestly that it is thanks to the *Mutus Liber* that, at last, after ten years of efforts—admittedly carried out only during the equinoctial seasons—we have succeeded in isolating the eminently volatile salt from the dews. It is in recognition of the decisive assistance Altus has provided us, and equally out of a spirit of charity and a desire that the same aid may reach others—all our brothers labouring in Celestial Agriculture—that we have been inspired to publish his album.

Let there be no misunderstanding, however: the undertaking is not an easy one, and requires, above all, that one arm oneself with courage and patience. Altus—and it is very important to bear this in mind—has outlined the sequence of operations only in broad terms, and in such a way that it is experimentation alone that will instruct the artist on the gaps to be filled, the order to be restored, and the implausibilities to be disregarded.

Faced with the intricate kiln, which we shall encounter again shortly, the lids of the two pairs of vessels with circular bases continue to catch our attention. Their shape was already that of small, spoutless cucurbits, and now it is this sort of levitation that is intended to inspire fruitful reflection in the enthusiast. Thus covered, the cylindrical vessel ensures the slow, enclosed circulation of the true cohobation, the great importance of which Sulat emphasises.

With the disappearance of the number that crowned the opening of the flue, we understand that the set time has elapsed, so that the contents of the four digestion flasks are once again gathered in the cucurbit. The pair adjust the apparatus and set in motion the phase whose result is soon visible—entirely unexpected—in the body of the still, namely this six-petalled corolla, existing only in potential, as it lies within a residual mass which the operator transfers with a spoon. Her companion, having removed the vessel, entrusts the rose to the sun god (the splendid *Mutus Liber* on vellum, from the National Library, differs from that of La Rochelle in that it completes the circular androecium of our central flower with a central point forming the sign of gold. This dot, which we encounter again on the Rue de Richelieu, on the four corollas of the tenth plate, was perhaps added in ancient times by the hand of some learned and charitable reader or owner) emerging from the waters, whose name is so close to that of dew; both words being, by their assonance, akin to the Greek **ΡΩΣΙΣ**, which means strength, vigour, health.

One might object that the nouns ‘rose’ and ‘dew’ both derive from the Latin terms ‘rosa’ and ‘ros’; yet this does not preclude the possibility that, even in Virgil’s language, Hermeticism has a role to play in this occurrence, given that, according to Macrobius, ‘Ros’ (genitive ‘roris’), meaning ‘dew’, was also the name of a god, son of Air and the Moon.

One might have thought, as we have, that Altus links the two human poles with the substance and activity that correspond to them. The woman who spread the coagulum before the lunar fire is replaced by the man who consigns the present ‘extractum’ to the fire par excellence.

Some may be surprised, if we proceed in accordance with Altus, that a solution concealing a living base receives a great measure of stability from the rays of the sun. Our observation is supported by Pierre Dujols, who himself formulates this very precise observation in the section of his *Hypotypose* relating to Plate III:

> ‘Certain authors, and by no means the least significant, have claimed that the greatest operational artifice consists in capturing a ray of sunlight and imprisoning it in a flask sealed with the seal of Hermes. This crude image has led to the rejection of

the operation as something ridiculous and impossible. And yet it is literally true, to the extent that the image is one and the same with reality. It is, rather, incredible that no one has realised this yet. This miracle is, in a sense, performed by the photographer, using a light-sensitive plate prepared in various ways. In the **Typus Mundi**, published in the 17th century by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, there is a device (also described by Tiphaigne de Laroche) by means of which the fire of Heaven can be captured and fixed. The procedure could not be more scientific, and we candidly declare that we reveal here nothing but a great mystery—at least as regards its application to the philosophical practice.'

Evidently, this is a somewhat simplified image, as it is necessary to select the appropriate medium for the luminous vibration.

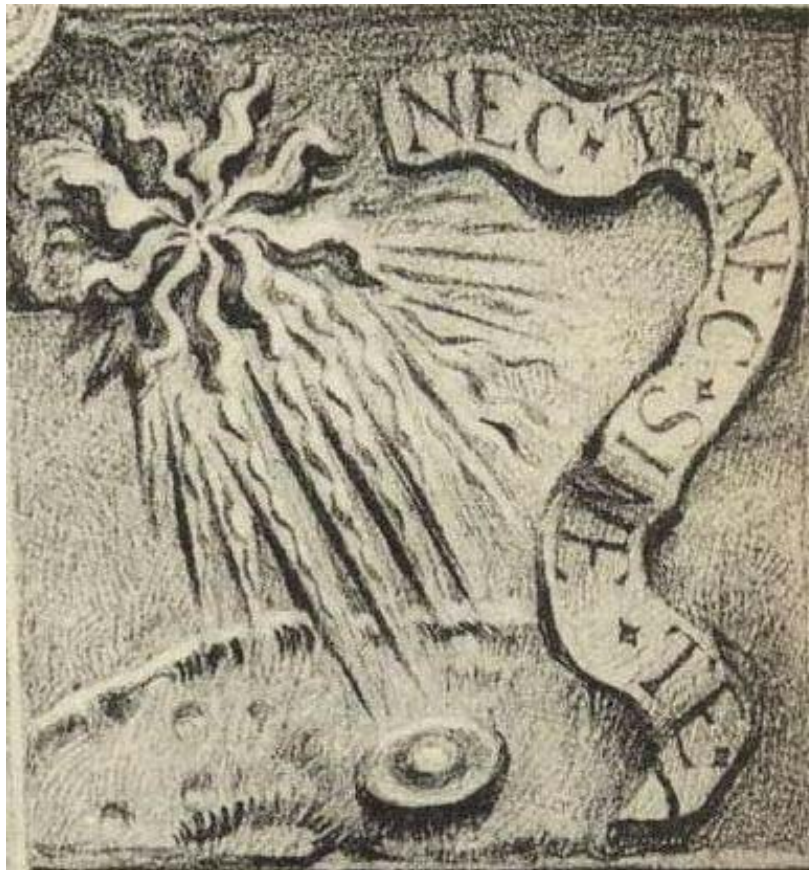


Illustration by Jean Julien Champagne

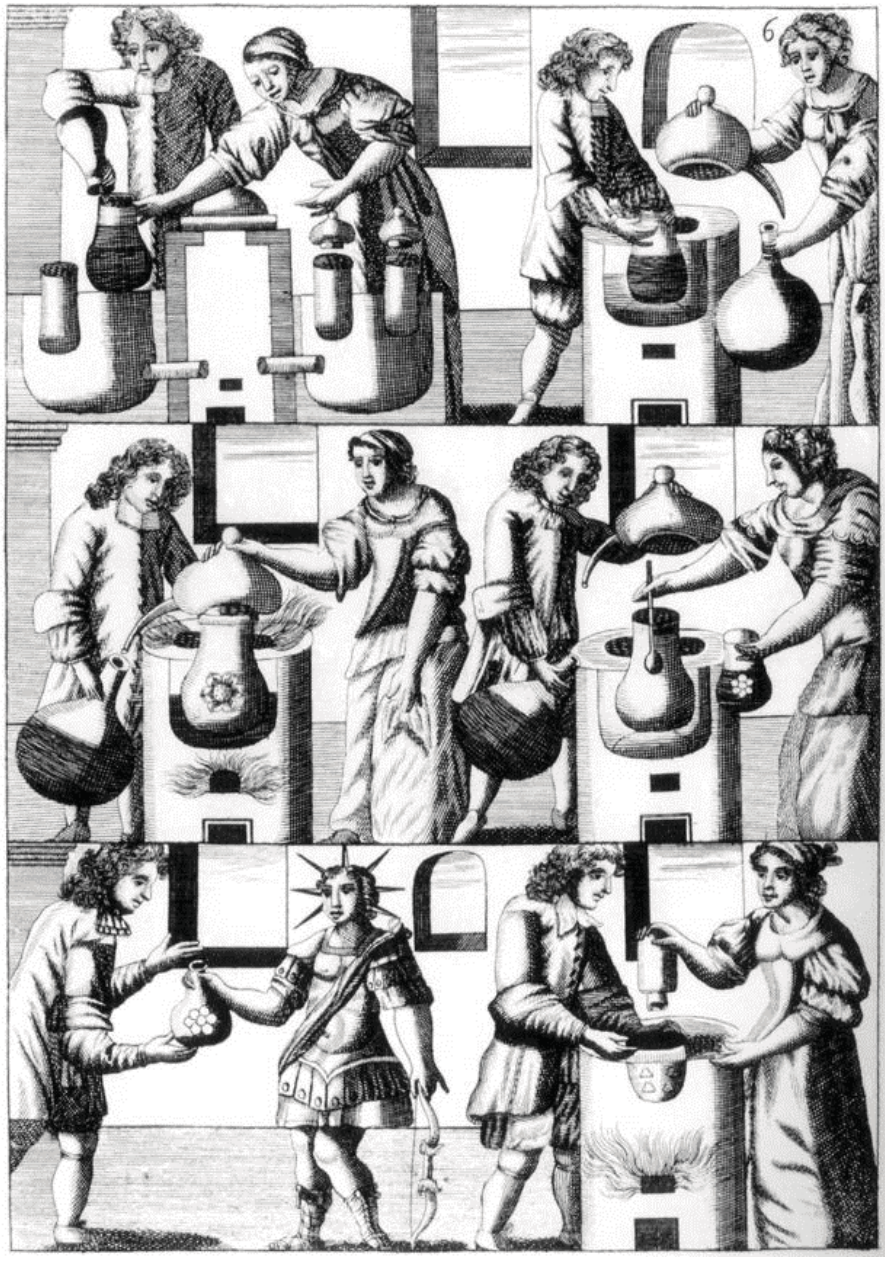
It is certainly true, moreover, that Jacob Sulat seizes the opportunity to draw us into the heart of the 'dry path'. Indeed, we see that the god Apollo wears the breastplate of Mars: a fact that no one could explain more authoritatively than Fulcanelli, with regard to the carved coffered ceiling at Dampierre-sur-Boutonne, from which the sun casts its rays so vividly:

> 'Nec te, nec sine te: neither you, nor without you.' An allusion to the sun, father of the stone, according to Hermes and most Hermetic philosophers. The symbolic star, depicted in its radiant splendour, takes the place of the metallic sun or sulphur, which many alchemists have believed to be natural gold. A grave error, all the more inexcusable in that all alchemists establish the difference between the gold of the wise and the precious metal.' *Les Demeures Philosophales*.

To these lines by the Master, we shall add a few words prompted by our assertion that Altus did not fail to evoke the dry path at this stage of the Great Work, where the need for a suitable substrate to retain the cosmic spirit becomes imperative. It will certainly have been noted that, in the flask with which the alchemist replaced the cucurbit he received from his wife, one can nevertheless see the little flower which henceforth appears to be isolated from the vessel impervious to distillation. Is it not evident, therefore, that we must consider that the glass of the flask itself has, figuratively speaking, taken the place of the coagulum which preserved the purest fraction of the philosopher's compound, symbolised by the simple flower with six petals? Must we not then understand that the viscous deposit is transformed, by the power of fire, into the vitreous substance that will dissolve the alchemical embryo, serve as its shell and vessel, and allow for its most delicate maturation?

> 'Moreover,' adds Fulcanelli, 'unlike the wet process, whose glassware allows for easy control and precise observation, the dry process cannot enlighten the practitioner at any stage of the work.' *Les Demeures Philosophales*.

To the left of the god Phoebus, of the sulphur or gold of the sages—always in each other's company, for sulphur cannot exist without mercury—the two artists continue their patient endeavour, each pouring, under the watchful eyes of the other, into a crucible the contents of the flask which she had given, in the previous engraving, to the lunatic Vulcan.



Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 7

The operation we see at the top left combines the product of the two distillations carried out, with the result of the immediately preceding consolidation; this has been applied to the misty extract, already concentrated and enlivened by the fire of the moon. The operator has turned the vessel—no doubt now cooled—over the large dish, which we have seen and shall see again later, whilst her companion pours the second distillate, kept in the large, round-bellied flask.

This is the place to say a few words about distillation, which the authors have presented as one of the most important phases of the Great Work. However, these descriptions are most often confusing and do not seem to apply to the physical phenomenon known by that term. There is, therefore, certainly a particular meaning, which Kabbalah must enable us to recognise.

The French term 'distiller' (to distil) comes from the Greek and is formed from the adverb 'diz', 'dis' *(*twice) and the noun 'stílh', 'stilé' (however little, a very small quantity*)*.

The very way in which the Greeks wrote the word 'cíle', with the 'episemon', indicated a special significance and compelled one to consider it carefully. Indeed, 'epishmon', 'episemon', indicated a special significance and compelled one to consider it carefully. Indeed, 'epishmon', 'episemon', meant a distinctive mark, a sign, that which is marked.

The hidden meaning of 'to distil' and 'distillation' conveys the secret process of allowing very little water to fall upon the earth on two consecutive occasions. In short, it is a matter of imbibing, of practising these imbibitions *or* distillations described in the treatises, which cause the earth—hitherto barren—to become saturated, softened, fertilised, to sustain its seed and to become fertile.

'Salts and alums are not the Stone, but they are auxiliaries of the Stone. He who has not tasted the flavour of salt will never attain the desired Ferment of ferments, for it causes that which is perfect in every way to ferment.
That which is above is like that which is below. Burn in water, wash in fire.
Boil and reboil, and boil yet more.
Moisten very often and always coagulate.

Kill the living and resurrect the dead.
And do this seven times. And you shall truly have what you seek if you know the nature of fire. Mercury and fire are enough for you.'

'Salts and alum are not the stone but aids to the stone; WHO HAS NOT TASTED THE FLAVOUR OF SALTS WILL NEVER REACH THE GOAL. Yeast is the leaven of leaven, for leaven is, after all, finitude par excellence.
As above, so below.
Burn and re-cook, and cook again. Moisten very
often and always coagulate. Destroy the living
and resurrect the dead,
And do this seven times. And you will truly have what you seek, if you know how to control the fire. Mercury and fire are enough for you."
Rosarium Philosophurum, printed in Frankfurt by the workshop of Cyriacus Iacobus, in the month of June, in the year 1556.

Thus the furnace, known as a 'barreño', always used in laboratories, is extinguished, allowing the alchemist to hold the vessel, whilst his companion, in ludo parvulorum, skims off the delicate stroma that has coagulated on the surface with a spoon. There is no better way to understand this process than by referring to some ancient treatise on chemistry concerning the preparation of true cream of tartar—which it would be a pity to confuse with that used by pharmacists, otherwise known as potassium hydrogen tartrate or, indeed, potassium bitartrate.

In our illustration, the vessel receiving the sublimated substance not only highlights the care taken to shield the product from any harmful influence of the atmosphere, but also reveals, through its transparency, the sign of ammonia, in the form of the asterisk which more precisely designates the highly secret 'harmoniac' salt, or salt of universal harmony. On examining the following plate, we shall explain why the symbol for crystal is repeated four times; this should not be taken to mean sodium chloride, and the Great Rosary also speaks of it in these terms:

'He warns that all well-prepared salt returns to the nature of harmonic salt, and that the whole secret lies in prepared common salt…

'He who, therefore, understands salt and its solution, understands the hidden secret of the ancient sages. Set your mind, then, upon salt and think of nothing else.'

> ‘Note that all salt, when properly prepared, returns to the nature of of harmonic salt, and the whole secret lies in well-prepared common salt.
>
> Whoever, therefore, knows the salt and its solution, knows the hidden secret of the Ancient Sages. Set your mind, therefore, upon the salt and think of nothing else.”
> Rosarium Philosophorum

In the lower compartment, Altus leads us directly onto the dry path, with Saturn devouring a small child amidst the flames of the brazier. This child, according to Filaleteo, is the sulphur that the Magi sought and found in the house of Aries – in domo arietes quaesiverunt Magi – and which the race of Saturn greedily receives. This is why, adds the Adept, just like a magnet, it draws it towards itself, absorbs it and conceals it within its belly (Quare instar Magnetos ad se hoc trahit, & in suo ventre absorbet ac abscondit. Introitus).

Next comes the purification, for which the operator of Altus pours, over the devouring god—symbol of the primordial and gross subject—the contents of a large flask, that is to say, the remaining liquid which he has collected after skimming.

> ‘This washing with plenty of water,’ (observes Magophon), ‘strips the body of its impurities, balances the humours, and renders it ready for subsequent operations.’

The innocent child, whom Saturn devours before our very eyes, is not alone; the son of Heaven and Earth slaughters, in the very same year, all those who live under his reign. The scene of this general slaughter by the sword—which ensures the existence of the infant Jesus, the divine fish or the sulphur of the sages—is depicted in the Book of Abraham attributed to Nicolas Flamel. The image on vellum in this beautiful manuscript shows us, filled with the blood of the slaughtered children, the very vat in which the god bathes for his ferocious feast, and reveals to us that the Moon and the Sun later come together to bathe in it.

There is no point in revisiting here the observation we made earlier, regarding the first illustration, which concerns Saturn himself, as well as the ambiguity arising from his person with regard to the sulphur symbolised in the realm of experimental alchemy. What, then, is this body whose insatiable appetite for all youth depends on the action of the two major elements, namely fire and water? It is the very elderly philosopher Artefio who answers us from the very first sentence of his Secret Book:

> ‘Antimony is one of the constituents of Saturn, whose nature it possesses in every respect; antimony is associated with the Sun, and within it lies the quicksilver in which no metal is submerged save gold.’

> ‘Antimony belongs to Saturn, and in every respect possesses its nature; and Saturn’s antimony corresponds to the Sun, and within it lies quicksilver, in which no metal is submerged save gold.’ *Liber secretus* by Artephi, the most ancient of philosophers.

To this clarification, however, we shall add our own observations regarding this generator of the ‘sola’, adopted as a motto by Nicolas Rollin, chancellor to Philip the Good (Le Mystère des Cathédrales). We shall go a little further than the Master himself, by examining the two tapestries dating from the fifteenth century, which are housed in the Hôtel de Beaune, and upon which the brief riddle is inscribed, surrounding Saint Anthony depicted as a hermit. The anomaly is as glaring as it is deliberate, in substituting Saint Nicholas, patron saint of the opulent minister, for the stoic anchorite of the Thebaid. How, then, can one resist the temptation to split the noun into two parts: **AN – TONIO**, to incorporate the two letters that form the name of the mineral which has found favour with a good number of artists?

The four repetitions, representing iron and salt, have endowed the Saturn of the sages with the whiteness and radiance reserved for the moon, the virgin Diana—this time complacent—depicted as a young woman in her robust nudity. She holds the flask bearing the four star-shaped signs, which is attached to the hilt of the sabre adorned with a bird’s head—the latter discreetly evoking volatility, whilst the former refers to the god Mars, as well as to the planet and the metal to which he is consecrated.

This is the first work, which is already, in its own way, the sublimation of mercury, of which the
President d’Espagnet tells us:

> ‘…is carried out in two stages, by removing the superfluous elements from it and introducing what it lacks; the superfluous elements are the external accidents that cover the brilliant Jupiter with the sombre sphere of Saturn. Separate, then, the black colour that arises from Saturn, until the purple star of Jupiter smiles upon you.’

> ‘The philosophical sublimation of Mercury is accomplished in two stages: by removing the superfluous and introducing what is lacking; the superfluous are the external accidents which obscure the resplendent Jupiter with the sombre sphere of Saturn: separate, therefore, the blackness emerging from Saturn, until the purple star of Jupiter smiles upon you.’ » Arcanum Hermeticae Philosophiae Opus: The Secret Work of Hermetic Philosophy.

Jean d'Espagnet also evidently influenced Jacob Sulat, through his works, which were rightly renowned. The president would often sign them with two Latin mottos that concealed, in an anagram, his first name and surname. The first was **SPES MEA IN AGNO EST**, 'My hope is in my lamb'; the second, **PENES NOS UNDA TAGI**, 'The waters of the Tagus are in our power'. Legend, and indeed history, have it that the waves of the Portuguese river possessed the power to carry gold nuggets in abundance.

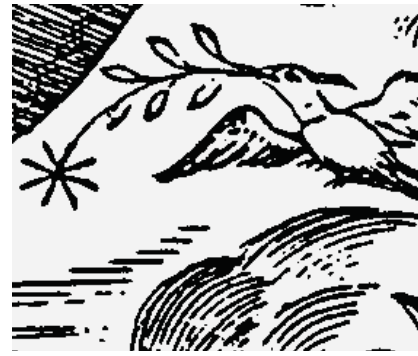
In the second motto, **'IOANNES'** should be read as **'IOANNUS**'. This is a licence that the extraordinary Latin scholar—who was also the upright magistrate of the Parliament of Bordeaux—could afford to take.

Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 8

This eighth plate is in turn complemented—or rather, elaborated upon—by the third, which should follow it immediately. It brings together the main elements of the perfect allegory of mercury, which two angels present in glorious form. Thus, the matter of the Work is personified by the mythological god, who is clad in a singular, winged petasos and stands erect, with two hermetic celestial bodies at his feet. Enclosed within the philosopher's egg, and beneath the rays of the cosmic star, he is supernaturally carried into the bosom of the external element with which he is particularly familiar. Indeed, the wind has carried it in its bosom – *portavit eum ventus in ventre suo* – according to the aphorism often cited by authors who thus express the volatile nature of the environment in which philosophical mercury is conceived and develops.

To the left and right of the composition, divided into two groups, ten birds in flight converge upon the hyaloid egg; of these, the first two carry in their beaks, at the tip of a plant branch: one, the sign of Tartarus; the other, that of the Harmonian.



Thus we shall once again find the second salt, which the thickening has raised to this fourfold potency, indicated by the two pairs of asterisks and further confirmed by the Moon, in its conjunction with Saturn sharpened with iron, as we can see once again in the figure above.

The two spagyric symbols that Altus concealed with the care demanded by their importance would easily go unnoticed. Two difficulties overlap:

one must first be familiar with this graphic language, and then be moved by the love that gives rise to all patience. In any case, these are the two saline agents which, in themselves, constitute the shell enclosing the substance derived from the sun and the moon.

The force of harmony is thus embodied and becomes the crystal or salt of Christ (**Χριστού**, Khristou, of Christ, and **αλσ**, als, salt); the force of harmony that the cosmos scatters over the earth and whose vegetative nature and green colour are indicated by the leafy twig, plucked by the bird's beak.

It is true that Altus tends to separate the two salts of the Work, used in the dry method, rather than showing them together under the very distinctive hieroglyph of the philosophical vitriol, which is green par excellence and which, in the ancient notation, presented the highly simplified outline of a key in a lock. However, since in alchemy every solvent, or menstruum, is also referred to as a 'key', it follows that the vitriol of the sages—which is, in essence, an alkali—was and remains the true alkaest (According to Martin Ruland, prepared mercury is called alkaest, which some claim to be tartar – *Alchahesi Mercurius dicitur praeparatus nonnulli volunt esse tartarum.* (Martin Ruland, *Lexicon Alchemiae*).

Alas! Who is not familiar with the absurd fable attributed to the mysterious radical-absorbing agent, which some claim was once sought after as the universal solvent—that is, of every substance on earth. Following Jean Kunckel, whose jest remains a source of pain (In Ioannis Kunckelii, Laboratorio chimico, Hamburg, 1722, in sermone germano, in the German language), learned people could not help but mock the simplistic deduction that the universality of the prestigious liquid's power would have prevented it, when enclosed in any flask, whichever it might be, from infallibly or immediately disintegrating it.

As we have pointed out, one must not confuse the 'salt of harmony' prepared by philosophers with the commercial ammonium salt, otherwise known as ammonium chloride or ammonium hydrochloride. There is a marked difference—and the error is impossible—between the small, fibrous, white or granular, colourless crystals of the latter salt, and those of the former, which are dimorphic, occurring as prisms or rhombohedra.

In order to support this observation, and also to further the education of the seeker of wisdom, we transcribe here, without adding anything, what Dr Juan-Enrique Pott reported, according to Cohausen, who is said to have set it out in *In Lumine novo phosphoris accenso*; in *The New Light of Phosphorus, Expanded*. Here, then, as conveyed by the celebrated German chemist and physician, is the most curious experiment carried out by his colleague, who was also his contemporary and compatriot:

> ‘He has stripped the sea salt from the coasts of Spain of all its flavour, by allowing it to be digested or, at the very least, to rot for at least forty days in the most subtle essence of dew; which has produced a completely different salt, fusible like wax at the mere heat of a lamp, with a more or less bitter taste, which seemed to resemble a nitrous substance, yet having neither a cubic nor a prismatic form; the crystals were piled up in the form of small flakes so transparent that he did not perceive them until after he had decanted the liquid.’ *Dissertations chymiques*.

As for the birds, Pierre Dujols, referring—without stating so—to Filaleteo, identifies them with eagles, which symbolise the sublimations that must be endured by the philosophers’ mercury. Regarding this demanding and lengthy part of the Great Work, let us see what the mysterious English Adept tells us:

> ‘Know, Brother, that the precise preparation of the philosophers’ Eagles is regarded as the first degree of perfection, and that a subtle mind is required to comprehend it.
>
> Moreover, when the Magi speak of their Eagles, they speak in the plural, and for this number they assign a range from three to ten.”

This, on the other hand, could be seriously misleading if one takes literally – if we dare say so – the single ampoule, which is definitively sealed only in appearance, that our two angels carry through the air and which we encounter once more at the bottom of the engraving. We see it within the athanor that separates the pair of alchemists, who are once again absorbed in prayer. This glass egg itself serves as an image of the tightly sealed environment in which the series of sublimations unfolds from start to finish. For it is indeed an egg that the artist crafts for each of the eagles he successively brings to perfection, in order to bring them together for incubation and hatching.

The eagles, or sublimations, form a series of small, identical firings, which serve the same substance—necessarily fragmented. This is why these ten tiny serpents are depicted, adorning either side of the rod that Mercury, inside the receptacle, wields in his right hand, from which the tiny creatures seem to emerge perpendicularly.

Moreover, the humble, reverent posture of our **‘labourers’** signifies the need for the ardent and profound faith that must be maintained whilst patiently awaiting the favourable time for the operation. This is why one should note the anomaly that the opening at the bottom of the furnace is left open, to frame the deepest black. However faint it may be, the light from the burning wick would

would seep outwards, even though the lamp in the centre should not be visible, due to the perspective.

The unforgiving critic, however learned, in the *Journal des Sçavans* of the last sweltering day, already cited, nevertheless decides that his ‘vaporous vapour’ is once more in full swing and that it aids the philosophers’ mercury in the separation of the two noble metals. To this end, two substances contained within this mercury come into play, one of which is white and the other red. But let us give the floor to the chronicler of the scholarly periodical:

> ‘The white is the Moon of the Philosophers, and the red, or the inner part, is their Sun; and it is from this latter that the Masters of the Art extract, using the spirit of wine, a tincture which is the true drinkable Gold of the Philosophers, after the Nitre has cooled and taken on a blue colour, shedding the green it had acquired in the crucible during the two hours of firing. It is also this inner part of the saltpetre, which is sulphur homogeneous with that of gold, since it acquires its colour gradually, and which, when prepared in a certain way, yields a most beautiful golden tincture for the Regulus of Antimony.”

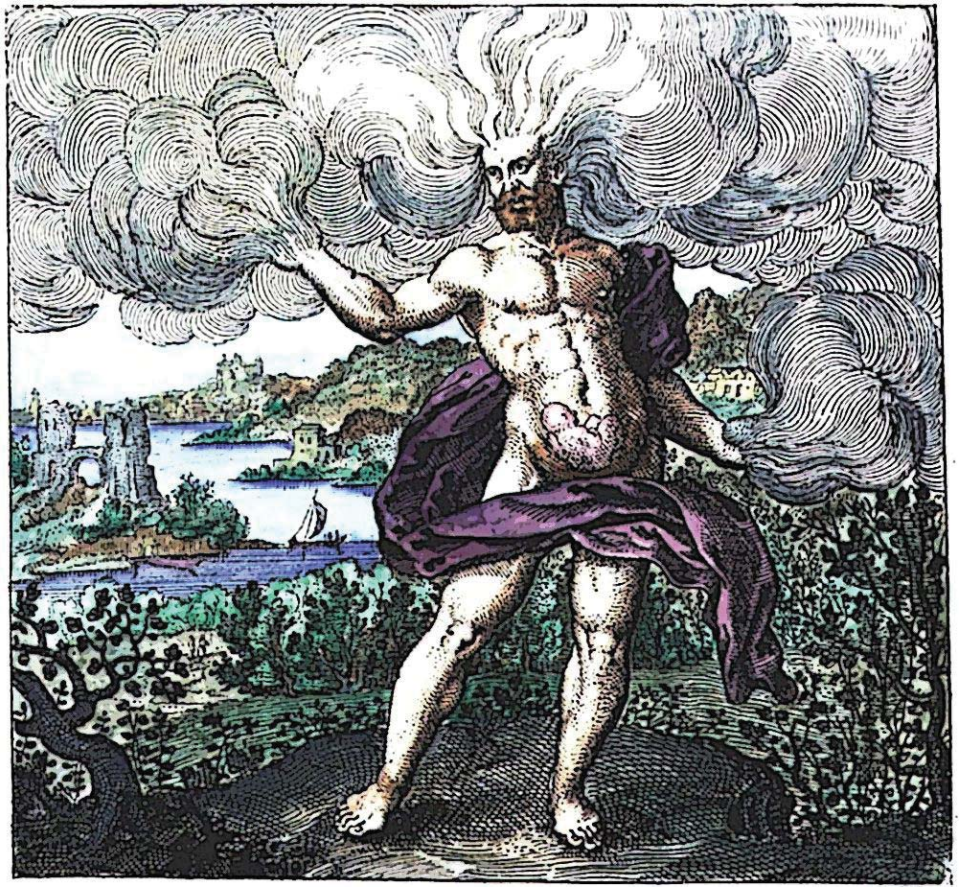
The saltpetre (in French ‘salpêtre’, in English ‘salpeter’ or ‘salpetre’, in German ‘salpeter’) of the philosophers, as proclaimed by the undeniable etymology of its name—Latin and constant—designates the salt that is for the stone or, indeed, that belongs to the stone: Sal petrae. Indeed, the second inflected form is of interest in both the genitive and the dative cases, both of which, moreover, denote possession.

The astonishing paradigm we are about to leave behind undoubtedly stands as a tribute to the saline trinity that presides over and contributes to the slow formation of the microcosmic egg. Altus expanded this to the scale depicted in the image—a scale that is gigantic compared to the actual size of the athanor, which lies dormant below in meditation and fervour.

> ‘Here, however,’ declares Irenaeus Filaleteo, ‘the truly secret furnace must be understood, which the common eye has never seen.’
>
> ‘Hic tamende furno verè secreto intelligi debet, quem oculus vulgaris vidit nunquam.’ Eyrenei Philaletae Introitus ad Regis Palatium.

This ideal furnace, then, is crowned by the drapery that Sulat has deliberately knotted three times, in a harmonious movement between the columns of the Temple: Jakin and Boas. Creating an almost religious—or rather Masonic—splendour, the pillars and drapery will vanish, in the course of the process, on the eleventh

plate, more or less identical, and where, inside the flask, beneath Hermes' right foot, the small solar face will acquire three additional rays.



The wind carried him in its bosom, –portavit eum ventus in ventre suo–

Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 9

The serious and attentive reader will not be surprised if we tell them that this ninth plate is no more in its proper place than the fourth, which ought to precede it immediately. It is easy to understand that this second part of the preparation prior to the work is situated alongside that of the initial gathering which we witnessed in the plate bearing the number 4. The precious liquid is now subjected to the action of the universal fluid, in large circular dishes where it appears to form a thick, black sludge.

These two stages of the preliminary phase of the Great Work must always be carried out in the season indicated by the two animals in their images, despite Magophon's assertion – regarding the fourth plate – made in the somewhat specious tone of benevolent candour. This sentence, which we have quoted in its proper place, must be supplemented here with the one which, in the Hypotiposis, follows it immediately and serves as its commentary:

> 'The Ram is Hermes Cryophorus, who is Jupiter Ammon himself; and the bull, whose horns signify the crescent—an attribute of Diana and Iris, who are identified with the cow Io, Jupiter's lover—is the Moon of the philosophers. These two animals personify the two natures of the stone.'

This is the moment to note that Pierre Dujols deserves, in this passage, the epithet 'envious'—an epithet which the philosophers do not hesitate to apply to one another, reciprocally and with
regard to themselves, to make it clear that their concern for prudence and secrecy sometimes leads them to dissimulation, as well as subterfuge. That the Ram and the Bull correspond to the two principles, mercury and sulphur, is an undeniable fact, which leads us to the two agents of the dry path. It is precisely these who will later be subjected to the action of the cosmic agent which must first be accumulated and retained, and without which the sage's work would be nothing more than a mundane succession of operations relevant only to chemistry.

On this point, Esprit Gobineau de Montluissant, 'on Wednesday 20 May 1640', whilst examining the north portal—or the Virgin's portal—at Notre-Dame de Paris, informs us with great candour.

> 'For the Ram and the Bull, as well as the Twins, situated one above the other, and which reign during the months of March, April and May, teach that it is at this time that the alchemical sage must go forth to meet matter, and take it in

‘the moment it descends from the sky and from the air.’ A most curious explanation of the enigmas and hieroglyphic, physical figures found on the great portal of **the** Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Notre-Dame de Paris.

When Altus made the waning quarter of the Queen of the Night shine in the sky of his illustrated title page, was he not perhaps intending to convey that the artist sleeps during this period of waning, and that he suspends his philosophical activities in the laboratory?

But we emphasise the need for the collection of dew to be enriched by the cosmic influence, in the descent of which both the sun and the moon play a part. Here is a clue that seems never to have been provided by the authors, and which Jacob Sulat expressed in an engraving that is by no means symbolic—a fact that perhaps binds him to the observance of the sworn secret. For we are in a position to affirm the reality of the two morning operations, which will be verified by anyone who, following our example, has the perseverance to repeat the procedures described at length by Monsieur des Marez.

One need only note the power of the geometric design through which the author of the *Mutus Liber* has depicted the cosmic projection to surmise, a priori, what the virtue of the latter will be. It is clear, in any case, that the two protagonists of the Great Work, veiled as the ram and the bull, are drawn to the celestial manna, each with the distinct impulse derived from their respective natures. For this is indeed a miraculous food, of which Jean François Noël tells us, in his *Dictionary of Fables*, that ‘Eastern peoples in general hold manna in particular veneration, and call it the confection of Omnipotence’. The humanist and diplomat of the Revolution also reports that the famous rabbi Akiba-Ben-Josef, who lived in the first century of the Christian era, maintained “that the manna had been produced by the condensation of celestial light”.

This was the very foundation of Gnosticism: that spirit and matter were one and the same, as symbolised by the Ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail – *serpens qui caudal devoravit* – and encapsulated in the motto: ***En to pan***; One is the Whole. The same reptile, emblem of the subject of the Work, appears in a manuscript from the library of St Mark’s in Venice, probably dating from the 11th century, which Marcelin Berthelot studied in great detail. One can therefore see on the reverse of folio 188, amongst the small drawings that make up Cleopatra’s Chrysopoeia (**Χρυσοποιή =** the art of making gold), this famous Ouroboros which has neither beginning nor end, and which accompanies, in Greek manuscript 2327 of the National Library, the maxim frequently cited in medieval Latin treatises: Nature rejoices in nature; natur natura laetatur.

On another level—that of humanity—it is highly likely that in fateful times of tribulation, peoples in peril receive from the heavens, and in a supernatural manner, the essential sustenance that the earth abruptly refuses to provide them:

> 'And (the Lord) rained down manna for them to eat, and gave them the bread of heaven. Man ate the bread of the angels: He sent them food in abundance.' Psalm LXXVII, 24 and 25

Consequently, we may compare dew to manna, the physical phenomenon of the former—which we observe regularly—to the miracle of the latter, which, according to the Old Testament, occurred at the time of the Exodus of the people of Israel:

> '…In the morning the dew also spread around the camp.
> And as it had covered the surface of the earth, it appeared, in the desert, as a fine substance, as though crushed by a pestle, like hoarfrost upon the ground."

The Bible also tells us that these two mysterious substances were confused with one another during tragic and unfortunate times:

> 'And when the dew fell on the camp during the night, the manna also fell.' (Numbers)

In this Plate IX, through the distinct scene at the bottom of the composition, Altus sought to indicate, without delay, the fate of this dew—the natural vehicle of the astral spirit—poured by the two alchemists into a flask which the woman shows to Mercury, who is somewhat put out and is pulling faces at her, so that we may understand that the time has not yet come for him to receive it.

From this celestial water—or, more precisely, from the precious salt retained in the solution—the metalloid will acquire its great and new virtue. It is personified by the mythological god, who is naked and holds, in his left hand resting on his back, the staff with the ten small serpents. This is a distinctive attribute, already noted in the preceding image, and which, as is known, signifies eagles or sublimations.

Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 10

It is important to bear in mind the warning we are about to issue as we begin our study of this image. The method of operation is so closely embedded within it that we must necessarily exercise a degree of caution, lest we fall into mere and simple disclosure. Many, to whom the procedures will already have seemed very complicated, if not impossible to follow in their linear progression, may find this surprising.

Above all, one must be convinced of the absolute certainty that speculation alone would not suffice; that material experience—which corrects error and authenticates and confirms the path—is indispensable. The part that appears external to the Great Work, and which Jacob Sulat has described in such minute detail—though laborious—is relatively easy to navigate and leads to the philosophical transformation of the two auxiliary salts, discreetly revealed by the eighth figure. Apart from the core, it is these that form the philosophical egg, shell and all; they consequently enclose it within a secret process of application and 'of nature', both physical and chemical, far removed from the work of a glassmaker, as maliciously portrayed by the author of the *Mutus Liber*. Pierre Dujols devoted a paragraph of a good dozen lines to this fallacious 'welding', which is sure to greatly amuse any craftsman specialising in the noble polysilicate.

Of paramount significance and relating to the vessel of nature, the two symbols found in illustrations VI and VII reappear; having been poured from their respective bottles, they now occupy the two pans of a set of scales. This instrument has been placed on the table, just as it will be again in the thirteenth image. As shown by its stem and its needle at an oblique angle of thirty or forty-five degrees to the suspension hook, might this not be a subtle indication of proportions ranging from single to double? It is, in any case, the position they present, once again and singularly, with the scales awaiting weighing and their pans level, on plate XIV. There is cause for perplexity, to such an extent that one would also be strongly inclined to conclude that the two ingredients were of similar weights, or that the ordinary balance was of no help whatsoever.

We shall soon give our view on this point, but let it be known straight away that the two items, each placed on a pan, could not represent a fragment, let alone a particle, but rather denote the two substances in their required quantities.

On the left, then, is the asterisk of the harmonian; on the right, the corolla of the philosophical gold; the latter evoking sulphur and the former salt. With great skill, the woman pours them together into the same flask, which is immediately marked with the two hieroglyphs. The operator, who has an ample supply of mercury—enriched in the previous stage and stored in a bulbous flask—adds this first principle to the other two already mixed, and, together with his companion, sets about establishing as accurately as possible the proportions and weights of nature. One should follow the alchemist's gaze as it turns to his right, assessing the purpose behind the preceding manipulation, as if he were gauging the additional contribution required to dissolve the sulphur. Thus our pair of alchemists completes, with the passive element, the trinity of compounds they are preparing here for the final firing.

Presenting this advanced stage of the Great Work as the very beginning, Father Francisco de Castaigne, in his *Basilian Aphorisms*, explains:

> 'We begin our hermetic work with the conjunction of the three principles prepared in a certain proportion, which consists of the weight of the body, which must be equal to that of the soul, and almost half that of the soul.'

For our part, we may add what we have observed in the course of our laboratory work, which we summarise as follows: that nothing is lacking in the philosophical process and that nothing in it is superfluous. Each of the components exists in the exact and appropriate quantity.

An exception must, however, be made for mercury—that is to say, this 'water' which the Sages advise us not to be without, and of which the Cosmopolitan certainly speaks in his famous parable:

> 'The work is something to which nothing is added, except the philosophical water that has been revealed to you on occasion in your sleep, which must be ten times the amount for one part of the body.'

> 'It is the only thing to which nothing else is mixed, except the philosophical water that has been revealed to you on occasion in your sleep, which must be ten times the amount for one part of the body.'
> Novum Lumen chymicum

Consequently, everything is naturally prepared in the philosopher's work, in this alchemy which was also called the art of music or the great harmony. From the same perspective, the egg or philosopher's flask could not be the vessel covered by its lamp, the bellows depicted in this tenth engraving. Only the harmonic salt can canonically close nature's receptacle; it alone can seal it within the

of the word. The Great Work is nothing other than a very positive ontogenesis, in which the fertilised egg, in its perfection, owes nothing to any external artifice, save, of course, that of the elemental fire. The philosopher's egg is a true organised body, endowed with its protective shell, its hard and brittle casing, which is calcareous in nature and is produced by the transformation of the salt at the periphery.

Altus has not deviated from the general rule, observed by the authors, of showing us only the oval glass flask required for the wet method, so that the compound may be subjected to the final firing. Similarly, in the dry method, the compound of compounds is placed in the appropriate crucible, so that it may form into an egg there and undergo the constant and progressive action of external heat. This is the conclusion drawn from everything that written by President d'Espagnet regarding the two vessels—natural and artificial—which he clearly distinguishes, as appears, in particular, in the one hundred and nineteenth canon of his *Obra Secreta*:

> 'The vessel in which philosophers cause their work to be cooked is of twofold origin: one is of Nature, the other of art. The vessel of Nature, which is also called the vessel of Philosophy, is the Earth of the Stone, or the female, or even the womb in which the male seed is received, decays and is prepared for generation. Now, the vessel of art is threefold; indeed, the secret is cooked in a vessel."
>
> 'The vessel in which the philosopher's work is cooked is of two kinds: one is of Nature, the other of art: the vessel of Nature, which is also called the vessel of Philosophy, is the earth of the stone, or the female, or even the womb, in which the male seed is received, decays and is prepared for generation; the vessel of art, however, is threefold; for the arcane is cooked in a threefold vessel."
> The Arcane of the Hermetic Philosophy

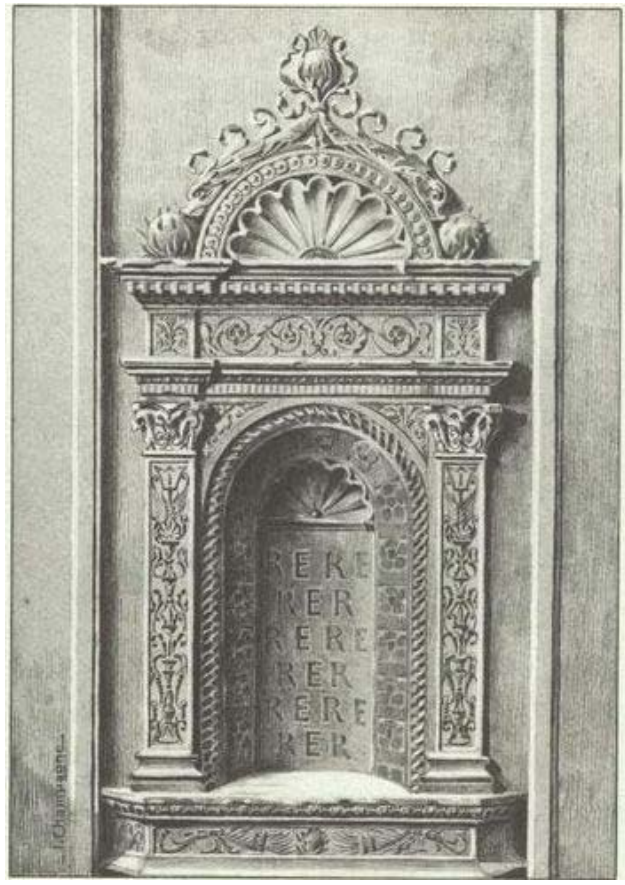


Illustration by Jean Julien Champagne

It is to this very natural vessel that Jean Lallemant's seemingly impenetrable riddle refers; the **RERE-RER** of the oratory, in the enchanting hotel, at which we were astounded, in 1926, that Fulcanelli had been able to explain it so satisfactorily— one was then too far removed from the alchemical conception to interpret the sculptures of the Berry mansion, which are shown to be in perfect harmony with the six Sibylline words and the decoration of the sideboard. The student will thus see this lengthy passage in which Fulcanelli, having reminded him of the Sibyl's insight—namely, that the philosopher is he who knows how to make the vessel—makes it clear that the secret vessel is not the container, even if it were of the finest crystal, but the very contents which, when subjected to fusion, take on the consistency and appearance of equally liquefied glass. As for this precious vitrification – how different it is from the

'vulgar mixture' – which retains the sulphur in solution, that is to say, the spirit that is always ready to escape – Fulcanelli advises us:

> 'Set about making it according to our art, without paying too much heed to glassworking procedures.' *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*.

This is why, with regard to RERE=4 and RER=3, it will no doubt have been noted that, of the four asterisks of the philosophical harmonium, three remain in our artist's flask. The one that is missing now hovers above the surface of the mixture prepared by the operator, in which the little flower is submerged only up to its midpoint.

When the flask is sealed, only the rose is visible; this is the symbol of sulphur or spiritual gold, soon to be nourished by the continuous and gradual heating within the athanor. Then, emerging from the darkness, the four colours will appear; on the Diana on the left, immediately beside the lamp furnace in gentle activity, they follow one another in concentric circles, from the black periphery to the dotted red at the centre, passing through white and yellow, or 'flavo' (Diana which the researcher will frequently encounter again in iconography, for example on the eighth key of the alchemist monk of Erfurt and the ninth figure of Solomon Trismegistus's Golden Fleece. The latter, who is erroneously identified in the Paris edition (1612) as Paracelsus's tutor, placed the symbolic disc in the right hand of the winged androgyne, who is dressed entirely in black. On the stove alchemical of Pfau, in Winterthur: this allegory is similar to that by Ba ed quite comfortably facing the goal to be achieved, is busy drawing his crossbow with the aid of a roe deer's leg. A second figure, not far away, is bending a sort of bowstring to test its flexibility—an essential quality for the bow he intends to make. At the end of the 'week of weeks' – hebdomas hebdomadum – the marriage of Diana and Apollo is consummated, and the most perfect union is achieved, the degree – or rather the transmutational coefficient – of which is represented by the number ten attributed to each of the mineral spouses. These are, as is well known, mercury and sulphur, or, if you will, the moon and the sun of

Philosophy; the latter symbolised, on the lining of Phoebus's left sleeve, by a lion-like mask which Jean Jacques Manget omits on the very same tenth plate of his somewhat unfaithful reprint.

Consistent in his choice of a plant-based vehicle for the cosmic agent, the Geneva physician replaced the landscape of bare hills—before which Diana-Moon and Phoebus-Liber stand, forming the fluid chain leading to the athanor with the palms of their hands—with a flat plain, sown with the nostocs previously observed in the fourth figure.

Let us note, in conclusion, the sentiment of King Hali, in *The Children's Game*, which sheds light on the Vessel or the Egg of the Philosophers – *Vase sive Ovo Philosophurum*:

> 'Learn the manner or progression of the vessel of our work, for the vessel is the root and origin of our craft. And this very vessel is like the womb in animals.'
>
> 'Cognosce modum sive gradum vasis nostri aperis, quod vas est radix, & principium nostri magisterii. Et idem vas est tanquam matrix in animalibus.' *Tractatus Opus Mulierum et Ludus Puerorum*

Manget's 1702 version

Mutus Liber
Plate 11 eleven

At first glance, this composition appears in every respect to be similar to the eighth.

Despite this, Mercury, or Hermes, in his transparent egg, rises above the land of his birth, which is now luminous, like the diaphanous substance that constitutes, according to Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac, the ordinarily inconceivable surface of the sun. It is a true pleasure to read what the philosopher tells us regarding this sublimated earth—that of Jacob Sulat's flask and the great plains of the day—which is also akin to fiery snowflakes.

> 'The reverence with which I trod upon this luminous countryside with my footsteps temporarily suspended the ardour with which my journey had been bursting forth. I felt utterly ashamed to be walking upon the day: my very body, astonished, sought to aid my eyes, and this transparent earth which they penetrated could not sustain them; my instinct, in spite of myself, having taken possession of my thoughts, dragged them into the greatest void of a bottomless light."
> Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac, *Les États et Empires du Soleil*

The god Mercury, instead of his usual petasos, wears, on this occasion too, a sort of cap. This headdress, pierced by two open eyes and flanked by outstretched wings, thus takes on the appearance of an owl in flight.

Here, curiously enough, is manifested the knowledge symbolised by the nocturnal bird, consecrated to Minerva and perched upon a vase on the obverse of Athenian coins. Boundless knowledge supplied by the 'mercury' of the philosophers, which bears not the slightest relation to quicksilver or the mercury of commerce. That of the sages, in the state of exaltation it has attained here, becomes a true and profound mirror, a source of reflection on the eternal and immutable present:

> 'It is in this mirror,' say the masters, 'that man sees nature laid bare. It is thanks to it that he can know the ancient truth in its traditional realism. For nature never reveals itself directly to the seeker, but only through this mirror which preserves its reflected image.'
> Les Demeures Philosophales.

[How impressive and unique the sturdy young man seems to us—moustacheless, yet with a collar-like beard—who represented Mercury in the cabinet of Christina of Sweden! His questioning gaze remains fixed upon *The Creation*, that is to say, upon the second shutter that once accompanied his own, serving to adorn his astronomical clock.

Instead of the genitals that his figure would have demanded, the god shows us the plump pubis of a woman, covered in delicate plumage, plucked as down from the navel. The same motif, both ornamental and protective, extends from the kidneys to the buttocks, at the level of which a dragonfly flutters; this insect whose amorous behaviour displays the most surprising peculiarities.

Painted in oil on wood by Hans Bandung Grien, the scene is complex: Mercury wears the helmet of Mars – whose raised ear flaps form two wings – and holds a long-handled caduceus in his left hand. For us, the greatest interest lies in the object he is pinching with his right hand, so that its flattened opening is visible; we identify this as the small, secret vessel of the 'dry path'. Very close to the son of Jupiter, a lion—symbolising sulphur—contemplates his image reflected in a pool of water, representing mercury or, if one prefers, the mirror of the wise.**]**

The examination is not easy, however, if Dante is to be believed, having followed, in his sublimation, *Beatrice*, who tells him:

> 'We are raised to the seventh splendour:
> Noi sem levati al settimo splendore.' From
> *Paradiso*, Canto XXI.

Indeed, the poet has been warned by his Lady of dangerous consequences that would place him in the position of Semele, reduced to ashes for having wished to gaze upon Jupiter in all his majesty. From a Kabbalistic perspective, the noun **Σημαλ□οσ,** semaleos—very close to the name of Harmonia's daughter—seems of great interest, as it was an epithet of Jupiter and meant 'he who provides the signs of the heavens'.

For this very reason, Dante would be like a branch shattered by thunder—'sarebbe fronda che truono scoscende'—were it not for Beatrice tempering the radiance of her own beauty. It is for this reason that the lover of science will not abandon the desire for intimate communion with the 'Mineral Virgin', whom Alighieri, in the person of Beatrice, made speak in close connection with our purpose:

'Fix your mind behind your eyes,
And make them the mirror to the
image
Which, in this mirror, will be visible to you.'

'Fix your mind behind your eyes, And
make them a mirror to the figure,
Which, in this mirror, will be revealed to you."

The speculum sapientiae owes its brilliance to the sun of the sages, or philosophical gold, which Filaleteo insidiously proposes to seek within metallic gold. This possibility is condemned by Magophon when, in his *Hypotypose*, he makes the following highly pertinent observation regarding what he calls 'vulgar gold':

'In this case, it is necessary to subject it to difficult and dangerous manipulations, for this metal can be transformed into fulminate, and eighteenth-century accounts report numerous fatal accidents resulting from this preparation. But if the disciple has been trained in the proper school, he will avoid this sophistical trap and work hermetically; thus he will sidestep this formidable danger.'

It is certainly important, as we have already emphasised, not to confuse the terms 'ammoniacal' and 'harmoniacal', and not to produce, by reacting trichloride with common alkali, the dangerous oxide known as 'fulminating gold'. This refers to 'gold lime' (calx auri), as it was known to the Ancients and to Basil Valentine in particular, who described its preparation in his *Haligraphia*, and who used tartar oil—that is, a solution of potassium carbonate—to precipitate his fulminating substance.

The water of the mirror of the sages, according to Altus, has attained a degree of extreme purity. The artificial and microcosmic sun that illuminates it—as one will have noticed—enters into exaltation, as indicated by its face, which is more finely radiated into ten figurative points representing the ten eagles or sublimations. Thus, Jacob Sulat's indications are at times evident and at others highly discreet, if not almost invisible, and it is precisely in this that they hold far greater value.

This is why the sign of sublimation—which is now added to that of Tartarus at the tip of the twig carried by the bird leading the left-hand fraction in a circular path—would very easily go unnoticed. We shall therefore focus

on this symbol, commonly used in ancient manuals, which depicts two small parallel bars, the upper one curving in the centre to form a semicircle ( ).

Some will immediately raise the seemingly well-founded objection that, in chemistry, it is impossible for any hyaloid compound of potash to be sublimated. To which we shall reply, of course, that one must not lose sight of the fact that we are operating on the plane of ancient alchemy, which remains unchanged, whilst the plane of science—empirical and modern, as elucidated by Lavoisier—is in a state of constant flux.

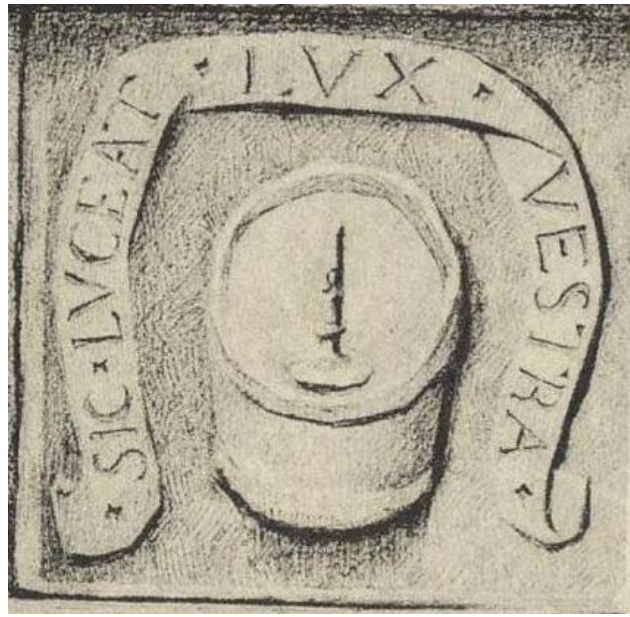


Illustration by Jean Julien Champagne

To respond with certainty to the peremptory allegation that might be put forward, we turn to the words of the celebrated Fulcanelli, who comments on the physical significance of the allegory taken up from the three synoptic evangelists by the Adept of Dampierre-sur-Boutonne, and summarised by him in the motto, **'Sic Lvceat Lvx Vestra**': 'Let your light so shine':

> 'Likewise, in the Work, we see the need to bring to light this inner fire, this light or this soul, invisible beneath the hard crust of dense matter. The process which the ancient philosophers employed to achieve this aim was termed by them "sublimation", although it bears only a very distant resemblance to the ordinary sublimation practised by spagyricists. For the spirit, though ready to free itself as soon as the means are provided, cannot, however, completely abandon the body; but it forms a garment more in keeping with its nature, more malleable to its will, from the pure and refined particles it can gather around itself, in order to use them as a new vehicle.' *Les Demeures Philosophales*.

We shall humbly supplement these timely and illuminating lines from our Master with some borrowed from Cyprian Piccolpassi, which are the opening lines of his *Livre second* and which relate to potassium bitartrate—in short, formed in the grape and the source of our cream of tartar:

> 'It should be noted that amongst us, wine lees are collected more frequently in the months of November and December than at other times, since by then the wines have undergone transmutation. Tartar can be collected at any time, provided the casks are thoroughly dry—by which I mean those in which the wines have remained for a long time. Once the inside of these has been scraped with an iron, a thick crust, one or two fingers thick, will rise from them; this is the tartar."
> L'Art du Potier.

We would add the advice – certainly not to be taken lightly – not to use any artificial means to make the removal of tartar easier. The dual factors of time and patience play a major role in this process, and one should, if possible, consult the work of Nicolas Lemery, in the excellent edition revised by Théodore Baron, himself a doctor of medicine (Cours de Chimie).

In the eighth figure, the diagram of sublimation does not correspond to that of tartar. This is what distinguishes it from the present image, where, moreover, the drapery has disappeared and two further window openings have been created, in the same laboratory furnished with the athanor, still flanked by its two figures in prayer. Thus, contrary to what Magophon suggests regarding this eleventh plate—namely, that it signifies the resumption of the preceding operations—we believe that it emphasises the

work symbolised by the eighth plate, and, more precisely, that it proposes its continuation and completion.

The lamp that was missing at the base of the furnace—and which was therefore not burning—is now lit, at the edge of the opening, so that it can be seen at a glance. It seems an excessive precaution that the thick curtains have been removed, for fear that the flame might spread; likewise, the provision for greater ventilation through two new openings is, one must assume, intended to ensure that the fumes and gases which might be released during the operation are more effectively vented. Given this dual concern—the fear of fire and the need for ventilation—it is certain that Altus intended this sort of small lamp and this voluminous flask, closed at a blunt tip, to be understood metaphorically; its mythological inhabitant is henceforth hidden from our view.

Moreover, one should take note here of the lamp's small size – minuscule in comparison to the furnace constructed by our Adept – so that, in its delicacy, it might indicate the agility and manoeuvrability indispensable to the proportionate application of fire. The apparatus, already mentioned, appears once more in the lower rectangle and corresponds, in short, to that which Filaleteo distinguishes from the secret furnace, and which he describes in a passage we shall summarise:

> 'It is the furnace we call common, which is our tranquil Henry, which will have been built of bricks or potter's clay… We call this furnace Atanor, the form of which that pleases me most is a tower with a nest.'
>
> 'Est formus quem appellamus qui est noster Henricus lentus, qui aut lateritius, aut ex luto figuli erit conflatus… Hunc fornum Athanor appellamus, cujus forma mihi magis arridet, turris cum nido.' *Intoitus*. *Philalethae*

Manget's 1702 edition

Mutus Liber
Plate 12

Just as the preceding plate seemed to echo the eighth, the one now before our eyes also recalls the ninth, almost to the point of being identical.

Indeed, we once again find the six large dishes exposed anew to the action of the celestial influence, with the difference that their contents, though at a similar level, undulate and stir slightly, due to the saturation and greater potency of the insemination, during the course of this further period. This is a design detail which the Genoese physician neglected to reproduce in his edition of his *Biblioteca química curiosa*.

If the ram and the bull, which appear in both images, undoubtedly represent the two protagonists of the Great Work—that is, mercury and sulphur—they also, and no less certainly, symbolise the two richest months of the spring season. Consequently, one can also easily imagine that the spirit of the World, 'le renouveau' (spring), formerly known as 'primevere' or 'primevoire' (the first green or glass), is both more abundant and more active during the month of May than it was during the month of April.

The movement of the waves has become considerable, which is transmitted to the sweet and deeply agitated liquor, positively illustrating the first paragraph of the Emerald Tablet:

> 'Yes, it is without deception, certain, and very true. That which is below is like that which is above. And that which is above is like that which is below, to bring about the miracles of one thing.'

> 'It is true without falsehood, certain, and most true. That which is below is like that which is above. And that which is above is like that which is below, to bring about the miracles of the One.' The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus

The waves are these waters which God separated—or rather, sublimated—at the beginning of the Book of Genesis, and which the ancient alchemists, in their microcosmic creation, have called the celestial waters.

> 'And God made the firmament; and He separated the waters which were under the firmament from those which were above the firmament. And so it was done.'

For one must not mistake the thick, churning mass—which, in this illustration, the moon regulates even more than the sun—for rain-laden, wind-driven clouds. Following the Master's example, we have often recalled the essential and external condition which Monsieur des Marez himself intended should be understood and observed.

The creation of this image requires, above all, that the night sky be calm and clear; that is to say, free from wind, rain or clouds. Jean-Jacques Manget, in his copy of the *Mutus Liber*, whilst not unaware of the pre-eminent role of the upper waters, committed a further act of infidelity by failing to adhere very precisely to the form the original designer had given them. One must not confuse the former's seething tide with the latter's stormy cumulonimbus clouds.

[In an ancient epigram, Jean Gruter states that Diana is the queen of the waves (Diana Regina undarum), of which the moon becomes the goddess, as confirmed by Jacques Tolle, who provides us with the following interesting clarification:

> 'Hence, at the full moon, when the moon presents itself, in its entirety, to the Sun, and during the hours of the equinox—that is to say, during the very conjunction of the moon and the sun—the boiling is usually, and by far, much stronger…'
>
> 'Hinc in plenilunio, cum tota Soli objecta Luna est, ut & sub horis aequinoctii, id est sub ipsum solis lunaeque coitum, aestus multo solet esse maximus,...' (Choses fortuites.)]

This is a significant substitution that must be emphasised, lest the attentive seeker plunge into an abyss of perplexity. In order to reinforce once more our point regarding this scientific and fundamental truth, let us once again open that singular book which, at first glance, appears to be far removed from the concerns of Hermeticism.

Let us therefore examine what Sir Cyprian Piccolpassi wrote, in his *Art of the Potter* brought to light by Fulcanelli, regarding the power of the white star of the night over fire—which, in this context, is not the ordinary element of the kiln, but the mysterious spiritual, saline and sulphurous agent of the athanor, described by the ancients solely as a secret. If we also bear in mind that the work of the 'potter' was frequently compared to that of the alchemist, we should not be surprised by such a precise exhortation:

> 'In this regard, let prayers be offered to God with all one's heart, giving thanks for all that He bestows upon us. Kindle the fire, always taking into account the phase of the moon, for this is of great consequence. I have heard from those who are experienced

in the art and who are experienced, that if one chooses to kindle the fire during the waning of the moon, the brightness of the fire comes to be lacking in such a way that it lacks splendour. In doing so, consider above all the signs of rain, which would pose a great danger, and you shall let them pass, always remembering to do these things in the name of Jesus Christ.' *Les Troys Livres de L'Art du Potier*.

Perfectly versed in the astral infusion of which the moon is the principal source, Jacques Coeur, the great treasurer of his king Charles VII, never failed to bear it in mind at the palace in Bourges. Thus, in the right-hand corner of the lintel, above the door leading into the chapel, one can make out the first-quarter moon, outlining a rather crude female mask. It is held aloft by an angel, wings outstretched, contorting rather awkwardly amidst the folds of the frieze. The celestial messenger is, however, benevolent and seems, in this hidden spot, to be lying in wait for a visitor who is a lover of alchemy, worthy of his exceptional trust, and ultimately capable of appreciating and receiving it.

On this important point, let us note what the anonymous author of an original treatise—which was probably written during the reign of Louis-Philippe—tells us. His language, in its simplicity and, indeed, set against the fantastical scope of current research, cannot fail to move any physicist imbued with objectivity and conscience:

'Everyone knows today that the light the moon sends us is nothing but a reflection of the sun's light, to which is added the light of the other celestial bodies.

The moon is therefore the receptacle or common hearth of which all philosophers have spoken: it is the source of their living water. If, therefore, you wish to transform the sun's rays into water, choose the moment when the moon transmits them to us in abundance, that is to say, when it is full or approaching fullness; by this means you will obtain the fiery water of the sun's and moon's rays at their greatest strength...

'In the south of France, the work may be begun in March and resumed in September, but in Paris and the rest of the kingdom it is not until April that one may begin, and the second phase is so weak that it would be a waste of time to concern oneself with it in autumn.' *Recreations Hermètiques*.

But the season matters, and, more importantly, the month in which, thanks to the favourable temperature, the two natures—antagonistic at the start of the work—then throw themselves against one another, like the ram and the bull, on either side of the six plates arranged in a triangle, with the apex pointing upwards, above our image. This arrangement

which was not chosen without reason and which, despite the perspective, takes the form of the trigon, known to be—when placed on its base—the symbol of all fiery power.

It is the evocation of the strongest force of all forces, of the Trismegistus in his Table, - haec est totius fortitudinis fortitudo fortis -; that of the nitrous and celestial spirit sought upon this twelfth plate of Altus, and which mercury will eagerly absorb, in its keen desire to develop, within itself, the sulphurous germ, the principle of its future coagulation.

Let us recall here the observation made by Fulcanelli in the first volume of *Les Demeures*, concerning the secret reason why the Egyptians regarded the cat—so subject to the moon—as belonging to the rank of the gods. The Master does not, however, reveal his full thoughts on the matter; for whilst he emphasises the little feline's whiskers, stating that they 'conceal a profound secret of science', he does not explain that it is by these that the enchanting animal finds its way in the dark. A sign in the form of **an X** on the radar – before its invention, we might say – indicating detection and telemetry, thanks to these waves with which the cat is saturated, to the point where it is sometimes nothing more than a crackle of flashes, which Altus knew well and for which he left us the lengthy procedure to capture them in their crystalline form.

The pair of alchemists, having filled their large flask with the liquid—which has become even richer following this second exposure—hand it back to the god Mercury, whom Magophon, on the ninth plate, has already seen buying the very same 'pot of this divine water from a peasant woman'. Philosophical mercury, as all authors state and as experience proves, eagerly seeks the universal spirit with which our elixir is here saturated to the point of allowing its incredible and entirely natural crystallisation to occur with ease.

In short, Manget repeated his fraternal gesture from the third and fourth plates, now placing, at the top of the bell tower we see here, the cross-topped sphere—the hieroglyph of the black mineral which only he possesses and which alone can provide the dry water that does not wet the hands.

Manget's 1702 version

13
100 · 1000 ·
10000 · &c·
100·1000·
10000·&c·

Mutus Liber
Plate 13

It will no doubt be noted, upon examining this image—which straddles the practical and the symbolic and resembles the tenth plate—that, in short, there are six plates in succession which, in pairs and at first glance, appear identical. This is not strictly accurate, as we have seen, and this time, moreover, very significant variations become apparent upon closer inspection.

The man, who is simultaneously pouring onto each of the scales' pans, has no more than two asterisks in the flask held in his right hand, whilst from the flask he holds in his left hand a tiny sun falls, in the place previously occupied by the flosculus.

The two small radiating signs remaining in the vessel together constitute the famous **RE**, namely two-thirds of **RER** and half of **the** initial **RERE**.

Above all, let it not be thought that we seek to complicate, or indeed obscure, Fulcanelli's explanation, to which we have referred our reader. The teachings of Jacob Sulat, to which we strictly adhere, preceded *The Mystery of the Cathedrals* by two and a half centuries. In the Master's book, as in the enigma of the Lallemant Hotel and the tenth and thirteenth engravings of the *Mutus Liber*, the subject is the 'compost', to use the term employed in the ancient treatises; that is to say, the philosopher's compound which is ready to rise in order to follow the gradation of weight, colour and sound, in perfect harmony with the progressive increase of the external and elemental fire.

Whilst ever mindful of ancestral obedience and the observance of secrecy, the Master did not hesitate to reveal to us that **RER** conceals the arcane mystery that is perhaps the most important of the Great Work. According to him, **RER** is the expression of the vessel that will enable the compositum **RERE** to be cooked and bring about its astonishing and successive metamorphoses until ultimate perfection is attained. When Fulcanelli asserts that knowledge of **RER**—in other words, of the vessel—easily entails that of **RERE**, it must be clearly understood that, in the philosophers' egg, as indeed in that of the hen more explicitly, the shell or container is formed at the same time as the various substances or contents, which are destined for the development of the new individual.

It seems pertinent to us to return to the glassy appearance of the philosopher's egg, which our Lord de Marez so insistently seeks to present to us in the form of a chemical flask, held over the flame kindled by the 'blowing alchemist'.

Although the vessel has also received its more than ample share of the influence from the second exposition, and although it is tilted almost to the horizontal in order to be sealed, the observer should not fail to notice the twofold peculiarity: firstly, that the sign of the harmonium has disappeared; and secondly, that the surface of the mercury bath has not changed, when it ought to be flat and perpendicular to the vertical. Are there not here two specific indications, both pointing to the fact that the ordinary laboratory flask is nothing more than the symbol of the egg, within whose composition the mysterious salt of harmony is absorbed?

According to the tenth plate, which is almost identical, the philosophical mercury still retained the mobility of a liquid even though the eight-rayed hieroglyph had ceased to be visible. It may indeed be added that the incorporated sulphur was in the vegetative state, clearly indicated by the wild rosehip of the sages in its development. As the first stage of the future and triumphant rose, the hermetic flower is now replaced by the sun it has brought into being. Of the mineral sun, the Hortulano—whose account we have already drawn upon—wrote the following regarding the verissimun, when commenting on the Emerald Tablet of Hermes, which he had broken down into short phrases and, at times, individual words.

> 'For the very true sun is brought forth by the art. And it is called "very true" in the superlative degree, because the sun engendered by this art surpasses every natural sun in all its medicinal and other properties.'
>
> Quia verissimus sol per artem procreatur. Et dicit verissimun in superlativo gradu, quia sol generatus per hanc artem, excedit omnem solem naturalem, in omnibus proprietatibus medicinalibus & aliis.
> Hortulani philosophi ab Hortis maritimis, Commentariolus in Tabulum smaragdina Hermetis Trismegiosti – The Short Commentary on the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, by the Gardener-Philosopher of the Maritime Gardens (National Library, 15th-century Latin manuscript, no. 201, fol. 89v

This sun, which, as is well known, represents both the sulphur and the gold of the sages, is the fourth compartment of our image; it is sent, by the alchemist and his wife, into the heart of the athanor.

Stirred by the inner flame, the coagulating power of this solar sulphur elevates the mercury to the highest state of stability; we shall encounter them both again at the bottom of the page and to the right of the philosophical furnace, in the guise of Diana and Apollo. The goddess bears upon her head the moon reclining in its ascending crescent; the god, the sun, is similarly encircled by rays.

On the left, the target formed by the four primary colours—which mark the four stages of the firing—is larger. Within the black, that is to say the outer ring, run the six hues revealed by the prism, which are: violet, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. Indigo is absent, even though it was very subtly distinguished in order to reach the number seven at all costs, without anyone ever having noticed it.

Apollo displays, on the short sleeves of his jacket, two lion's faces instead of just one for the tenth plate, signifying the union within him of the dual sulphurous principle—that is to say, the two lions, green and red—masks which Manget did not include in his engraving. On the side of the god's boots, one can make out the three dots which the Freemasons were to borrow from the Great Work and which the author of the invaluable Library either did not know how, or did not wish, to indicate. Our intention is different, just as our attention is held by the bowstring, which lies slack on the tenth plate, and is now taut in a manner suited to hitting the target with greater precision.

Diana and Phoebus, deities of the Hermetic Olympus, for the magnetic bond, have reversed the position of their hands, joined flat, palm to palm, whilst their power, which originates from the dozen, is also multiplied, each time, by the dozen. Thus the progression continues into the thousands, which the phrase 'et caetera' indicates as boundless, in such a way that, from this Medicine.

> 'By a small part cast upon the waves of the sea, if the
> sea were then of quicksilver,
> the whole of it, despite its immensity, could be turned into
> gold.' Ipsius ut tenui projecta parte per ondas
> If the sea were alive, it would be silver. It could turn
> even the vastest sea into gold.
> Ioannis Aurelii Augurelli, Chrysopoeia Liber Tertius, in Theatri Chemici volumine tertio. Argentorati 1659, p. 244. The third book of the Chrysopoeia by John Aurelius Augurelli in the third volume of the Theatrum Chimicum, Strasbourg

This, then, concerns the process of multiplication, which is the final stage of the Great Work and of which Magophon spoke very little in his explanation of this image, having devoted only three lines to that of Plate XII, which immediately precedes it.

In his second work, whilst studying a coffered panel of the marvellous ceiling at the castle of Dampierre-sur-Bautonne, Fulcanelli proved far more generous. It is important to reflect on his lengthy passage, which we shall supplement today with the teachings of Jacob Sulat—themselves corroborated by Guillaume Salmon's definition in his Dictionary:

‘Multiplication has been concealed by the sages beneath the fable of the Hydra, from which, if one head were cut off, ten would grow back: for with each Multiplication, the stone increases its virtue tenfold; this is what true Multiplication consists of’
Paris, Laurent d’Houry, Rue Saint-Jacques, opposite the Saint-Sévérin Fountain, at the Saint Esprit, 1695, p. 128.

The anonymous commentator in the *Journal du Sçavans*, who was undoubtedly influenced by the successive multipliers of the transmuting base, merely noted briefly:

‘Plate 13[a] contains the Projection.’

‘The projection powder,’ explains Dom Pernety, ‘is a powder resulting from the art of the alchemists, which they project in very small quantities onto imperfect metals whilst they are molten, thereby transmuting them according to their degree of perfection.”
Dictionnaire Mito-Hermetique, Paris, Bauche, 1758.

Manget's 1702 edition

14
VI
II
X
Ora
Lege Lege Lege Relege labora
et Inuenies.

Mutus Liber
Plate 14

The three furnaces occupying the upper rectangle of this penultimate plate correspond separately to each of the three figures situated directly below them, so as to collectively evoke the three main and distinctly separate stages of the final firing. These two women, with their spinning wheels slung round their waists, and this boy who has set aside his racket and ball, through the attention and care they devote to ensuring the heating lamp functions properly, demonstrate just how essential it is that the heat be maintained and well regulated throughout this meticulous operation. Thus, with great dexterity and simultaneously, they are seen using scissors to trim the burnt part of the wick and to refill the reservoir with fuel.

It is undoubtedly not without a touch of black humour that, reflecting the prevailing view of most reputable authors, a treatise on alchemy begins auspiciously – incipit fauste – with the following phrase, which could, in every respect, serve as a caption for the coming together of these three unexpected characters.

'The progress of the Work is called "all women's work" and "children's play".'
-The term 'operis processio' refers to all women's work and children's play-

A priceless text which 'was transcribed from a very ancient book by a certain doctor residing in the famous city of Leipzig – est per quendam doctorem in famosa civitate Lypsiae commorantem, ex vetutissimo libro exscriptus.'

This ancient book once belonged to Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor, under whose guidance he worked, fashioned our Stone and brought it to perfection. Furthermore, he founded many monasteries of various orders and erected numerous and notable collegiate churches and cathedrals, etc.
(This book once belonged to Charles IV, Emperor of the Romans, on the basis of which he also had our Stone made and completed it most perfectly. He also founded many monasteries of various orders and erected and established numerous and remarkable collegiate churches and cathedrals, and so on.)

Indeed, there was no doubt that this monarch of the Holy Roman Empire, born in Prague in 1316, who was a particularly great patron of the Arts and Sciences, was most grievously slandered and disparaged.

Let us now turn to the extraordinary text, which was perhaps the breviary of the son of John of Luxembourg; let us therefore examine what relates most directly to the section of our image currently under consideration. Chemically or spagyrically, the

trio of objects that constitute the delight of youthful hermetic diversions is scarcely veiled. First, the satellite of purification; next, ammonium chloride; and finally, the hardest fuel:

> ‘Now, the triple play of children must precede the work of women. For children play with three things. Firstly, often, with very old walls. Secondly, with urine. Thirdly, with coals.’
> ‘Debet autem triple ludus puerorum praecedere opus mulierum. Pueri enim ludunt in tribus rebus. Primo cum muris frequenter vetustissimus. Secundo cum orina. Tertio cum carbonibus.’

The same adept explains, immediately afterwards and succinctly enough, the philosophical and scientific significance of these three strange games:

> ‘The first game provides the substance of the stone. The second game enhances the soul. The third game prepares the body for life.’
> ‘Primus ludus materiam lapidis ministrat. Secundus ludos animam augmentat. Tertius ludus corpus ad vitam praeparat.’

As for women, the anonymous alchemist tells us that their occupation consists of cooking – opus earum est coquere – concluding with the very same phrase that favours a predisposition towards intelligence and which Magophon used, at the end of the passage he devoted to the fourteenth plate in his *Hypotypose*:

> ‘Qui ergo potest capere capiat.
> Let him, then, who can grasp, grasp.”

No one doubts that the bookseller—a distinguished Hermeticist, Latinist and Hellenist—had read, long before us, the treatise we have just examined, in the second volume of *The Art of Making Gold*, entitled *Chemistry*. In the second volume of *Artis auriferae*, known as *Chemia*, Basel 1610, pp. 111 and 112, which led him to exercise great caution regarding the interpretation of Sulat’s engraving:

> ‘We must not here disregard the author’s intentions, which bear witness to his firm resolve to let the symbol alone express his entire thought.’

Subsequently, the numbers VI, II and X, written in Roman numerals, correspond to colours, of which the first six—as we have pointed out—are those of the prism and merge into black. This series, which, according to Fulcanelli (Les Demeures Philosophales, Volume 1, p. 280, see note), cannot be perceived by the naked eye except through glass, is followed, halfway through the

firing, by the peacock's tail and whiteness. These two coloured stages and the central fissure are indicated by the boy and his numeral, II, which, moreover, by a step in front of the two spinners, mark the point at which the increasing heat must henceforth begin to diminish.

In addition to these colours, the last two are yellow and then true red, which lead us to number **X** of the totality. The red that concludes the prism of the dark period was always described as 'false', in contrast to the final ruby that characterises the Universal Stone or Medicine, or indeed the Great Red Wax – Optima Cera Rubea. A significant periphrasis for which Fulcanelli provides us with a detailed explanation (Demeures Philosophales, vol. 1, p. 178)

At the beginning of our Introduction, we set out the succinct definition that Martin Ruland mentioned in his Lexicon. Alchemy is the separation of the impure from the purest substance. The very idea of constant progression and concomitant improvement within the artist's innermost being is revealed by the term with which the alchemists wished to designate the colour and nature of the Philosopher's Stone. Purple, derived from the Latin *purpura*, which is a deep red; in the alchemy of the Word, the pure of the pure, *pur puros* (***πυρ πυροζ***), that is to say, the fire of fire.

In the third rectangular compartment, the two stages of the firing process we have just outlined are depicted: the first culminating in the 'white stone', and the second in the 'red stone', the latter characterised by the sun and the former by the moon. In cross-section, inside the two furnaces, one can see the vessel of nature covered with its lid or operculum, during the two phases of the same firing, each of which will last three days. This is indicated by two spheres, alongside the atanors, each of which circumscribes the alchemical symbol of the day three times; this symbol consists of a small circle topped by a stem extending the vertical axis.

Although the flames, which here lick at the philosopher's egg, far exceed those of the finest oil lamp—even one with multiple wicks—they still indicate a heat that barely exceeds 400 degrees. This is an opportunity to recall that modern science itself has dispelled the false notion that very high temperatures were indispensable for any transmutation to take place. Thirty years ago, this was still the main argument levelled against the alchemists: that they had not had sufficient means of heating at their disposal to attain the high degrees of heat required. It is now recognised that the real agent of transmutation within the mineral kingdom is magnetism, which undeniably must be driven by some external source of energy.

Following the two mineral orbs in exaltation, an invisible force tips two domes onto two discs with thin rims, from which a handle extends. On a smaller scale, these small bowls bear a striking resemblance to the vessels visible in the furnaces immediately above. A thin, viscous stream pours out, covering the plate on the left but failing to reach the one on the right, where it slides outwards. Here, the failure emphasised by the woman is grave, with two fingers raised in imitation of the devil's horns; there, the success signalled by the man with his index finger; both bringing their left hands to their mouths in a gesture of silence. This disc, fitted with a seal and a handle, appears as the mirror regarding which the ancient authors were so discreet and in which the alchemist uncovers all the secrets of Nature. The marvellous moon is constituted by the mercury of the sages, driven to the very extreme of its purification. This solar mercury is seen inside the flask, beneath the well-known hieroglyph, yet completed by the central dot which transforms the circle into the symbol of gold and the sun.

The flask, situated between the two strange mirrors, just above the tongs, is undoubtedly open, and in it Magophon sees 'the flask hermetically sealed
hermetically sealed with its stopper'. It is, moreover, an understatement on his part to say that this 'fourteenth plate is devoted chiefly to the apparatus'. It is
true that one can make out the mortar and its pestle, the skimming spoon, the balance and its two sets of weights nested one inside the other. Of these and that, we shall see in Plate X what we have set out from a philosophical point of view.

As for the famous piece of advice, towards which the alchemist and his wife adopt a discreet attitude, we consider it too significant to be satisfied merely with repeating it:

'Now, read, read, read, reread, work, and you shall find.'

Let us return to the opinion of the *Journal des Sçavans*, which was published, as is well known, in the middle of the reign of Louis the Great. It is all the more valuable in that it leads us to this curiosity, which is not without analogy to the vegetative virtue of our Moon, and which presents us with the Tree of Diana—that is to say, the elegant crystallisation that arises, in a spagyric manner, from the amalgam of mercury and silver within nitric acid:

'… the 14th(engraving) seems to depict the form of an artificial and perpetual mine, in which gold and silver grow like plants upon the earth: for experience shows that one ounce of silver dissolved in the spirit of nitre grows in a flask in the form of a metallic tree, if half a pound of spring water and about two ounces of good common mercury are added to it."

Here, then, is something that is, ultimately, a world away from Jacob Sulat's alchemical allegory, the interpretation of which would be incomplete were we not to return to the masterful significance of his three atanores. We have no doubt, indeed, that they symbolise this trinity under whose aegis the labourer becomes a philosopher through fire – philosophus per ignem.

Three fires are employed in the Great Work, 'without which', Artefio specifies, 'the art is not perfected, and he who works without them undertakes his labours in vain.' '…sine quibus ars non perficitur, & qui absque illis laborat in vanum curas suscipit' (Artepii Liber Secretus). ' The first—the noblest—is the natural fire, which is also the spirit of life hidden within matter; the second is the secret fire or 'lunatic Vulcan', which is enclosed within the saline, hyaloid and composite auxiliary prepared by the alchemist; the third is the unnatural fire, which nourishes, stimulates and animates the first two, and which produces all combustible substances.

The fire of oil, for example, which was favoured by both the adept of the *Mutus Liber* and the
equally anonymous alchemist of the *Filet d'Ariadne pour entrer avec sécurité dans le Labyrinth of Hermetic Philosophy. Paris, Laurent d'Houry, Rue Saint-Jacques, 1695,
is presented as the ideal source of heat that is both gentle and moist, conducive to putrefaction. In a rigorous and profound analogy, too, the student will examine, in our third preface to *The Mystery of the Cathedrals*, the significance of putrefaction for man at the moment of his death. This dissolution of the body, both slow and necessary, within the material bosom of the earth—this dissolution in the face of which SCIENCE, the poisoner of waters and air, today expresses so many vast and inexplicable concerns.

Manget's 1702 edition

15
Quiescatus ab ire
Ire quiescatus ab

Mutus Liber
Plate 15

Here is the final figure and the third to adopt, albeit laconically, the customary language of the printed word:

'OCULATUS ABIS' – You depart, clairvoyant

The dream has come true and the ladder of communication with the spheres reputed to be inaccessible, having fulfilled its purpose, is abandoned, lying on the ground. In the course of our examination of the fourteen engravings that have followed one another, it will have become clear what constitutes the ascent and then the descent, the operative ascent and descent, between heaven and earth by means of the Ladder of Philosophy. The symbolic instrument, obscured in the illustration by the praying couple, shows only eleven rungs, rather than the twelve revealed by the angels at the beginning, in accordance with the Treatise known as the Ladder of the Philosophers – *Tractatus Scala Philosophurum dictus* – which titles its final chapter as follows:

'The twelfth and final step of this Ladder and of the entire Work, which brings it to a close, and which is called the Projection.'
'Duodecimus gradus & ultimus hujus Scalae Sapientis & totius Operis completivus dicitur Projectio.'

The nature of this work will now be assessed in a few lines taken from the section immediately preceding the start of the first degree of the Ladder of the Wise – primus gradus Scalae Sapientum incipit:

'Thus our gold is not the gold of the common people, for ours is spiritual; for it dissolves all imperfect bodies, separating the pure from the impure; because nature receives only that which belongs to its essence; but it rejects the opposite, which is the sign of its perfection.'
'For our gold is not the gold of the common people, since ours is spiritual; for it dissolves all imperfect bodies, separating the pure from the impure; for nature accepts only that which is of its own nature; but it rejects that which is foreign, which is a sign of its perfection.' In *De Alchimia opusculis **compluribus*... Frankfurt, 1550

The labours of Hercules, or of the alchemist, are complete, and the hero, somewhat weary despite his strength, appears at first glance to be asleep upon the skin of the fearsome Nemean lion, with his club lying beside him—a club that is now of no further use to him. In

this regard, the sentiment expressed by the anonymous critic in the *Journal des Sçavans*, in the very year the *Mutus Liber* appeared, is noteworthy.

> 'The fifteenth and final plate seems to show that common Mercury, which was previously as indomitable as Hercules, is at last subdued, and that after its death the Sun and the Moon are formed from it—that is to say, the artificial gold and silver of the true Hermetic Philosophers.'

Indeed, crowned by the two alchemical celestial bodies he has brought into being, Heracles has left his body in the throes of death, in anticipation of his glorious ascension. He does not enjoy the physical repose associated with rest, and raises his right hand to his aching forehead. Ovid describes this marvellous death in five verses in which the grace and ease of his genius shine through:

> 'Just as it usually happens that a snake, having shed its old skin, is renewed, with its old skin cast aside and the new scales glistening green.
> So, ever since the hero of Tiryns has cast off his perishable limbs, he is strengthened by the best part of himself and seems all the greater.
> And he embarks upon a future worthy of reverence through a holy majesty"
> 'Utque novus serpens posita cum pelle selecta
> Luxuriare solet, squamaque virere recenti,
> So, having cast off his mortal limbs, the
> Tirynsian thrives on the better part of himself,
> and has begun to grow greater, to be revered
> for his august dignity."
> (Metamorphoses, Book IX – Ninth Book of the Metamorphoses)

[There are many good translations, but they are literary and therefore, to a greater or lesser extent, the product of a freedom that obscures the esoteric meaning. We have already mentioned how much **'plasticity'** the French language offers for adaptation into Latin. It is easy for a Latin scholar to appreciate our observation.]

This, in brief, is the image of the new artist Alcides, who has slain the old man in order to rise to the rank of adept. His wife and he – like mercury and sulphur – seem to utter, together and inwardly, the adjective and the verb of the short phrase repeated twice, for the benefit of the man whose face is hidden amongst his hair and beard, which the two angels raise and crown. These angels were seen on the title page, ascending and descending the ladder erected towards the firmament, fulfilling Jacob's dream inspired by the rough stone:

> 'OCULATUS ABIS' – You depart with clear vision

We thus recognise the blessed figure whose departure is so miraculous, and who, with arms outstretched, unfurls a long cord with tassels. This figure,

falling on either side, is supported by the two figures from the *Mutus Liber*, both kneeling, and whom we believe are reunited in the one, glorified *ens*. For the exalted Chosen One, as well as for the agonising, beardless youth—no less sparingly clad and depicted in his youth, so that the modesty of his learning might be recognised in relation to the infused knowledge of the new man—for both, we say, it is difficult to accept the assertion that Pierre Dujols perhaps erred in formulating too hastily:

> 'The fifteenth and final plate depicts the apotheosis of Saturn, victorious over his son Jupiter, who had dethroned him and who now lies motionless on the ground.'

It would be worth pausing to consider the striking peculiarity of this fifteenth plate. Indeed, contrary to the ordinary and logical relationship, the moon is here united with the man, and the sun with the woman; so that it must be understood that the union of the two natures has been radically realised, symbolised moreover by the two hands clasped together. It also appears that the sun, shining aloft, has absorbed its celestial companion during this final sublimation, just as in plates 2, 8 and 11, which relate to the exaltation of the spirit. All this entitles us to read the Latin on the banner as follows:

> 'OCULATUS AB IS – The clairvoyant who has emerged from these.'

In alchemy, the Kabbalah is governed primarily by phonetics and does not take spelling into account. We do, however, respect the spelling when applying it to the pronoun-adjective in our second reading, since the ablative plural—here indicating origin—**'eis'** or '**iis**' is correctly written **as 'is**', even if this is not always the case in epigraphy.

The new being, resurrected in flesh and spirit, henceforth dwelling on the extraterrestrial plane, pinches between thumb and forefinger – whilst the other fingers grip the cord –
the two flowers, white and red, which he has gathered and which are the emblems of the Philosopher's Stone. ***[***It is these two corollas that the alchemist designates, at the end of his great work, concerning the final key of the famous monk of Erfurt. The red one is crowned there by the sun, the
white one by the moon, and both emerge together from a Hessian crucible. (Les Douze Clefs de la Philosophie de frère Basile Valentin, op. cit.)***]***

The sturdy rose stems that supported them at their base, on the first plate, are replaced here by two olive branches, recognisable by their leaves and their fruit. Manget's design undoubtedly misled Magophon, who decided, evidently without reason, that 'the two rosehip branches on the frontispiece are now laden with red and white berries'.

According to legend, Hercules or the alchemist, having completed his labours, shared with Minerva the glory of bringing forth the olive tree. It is also known that this tree is the symbol of wisdom, peace and abundance, which correspond exactly to the three privileges bestowed by the Philosopher's Stone upon the artist who has received it. Namely: knowledge, health and wealth.

The two gigantic branches, arched in a semicircle to frame the scene, are tied together at the bottom to form an **X**, and are adorned with two outstretched wings; the former symbolising matter and its volatility, the latter the spirit and its steadfastness. The Greek **X** (Khi), like the cross, embodies the concept of radiation in its simplest form; it is, according to Fulcanelli, the sign of manifested light, the fire hidden within matter—this most secret little sun exalted by Altus at the head of the image, beneath the radiant face of the great cosmic brother who has become solitary.

Is the coat of arms, positioned at an angle at the junction of the two stems and beneath the knot that joins them, perhaps that of our author, the mysterious and anonymous Adept?
Will some curious, patient and fortunate heraldist also inscribe beneath this coat of arms the name of the family which we have not succeeded in discovering? In any case, here is our interpretation, despite the uncertainty of the design:

Sable, a chevrons argent cut off, accompanied, in chief, by three shells (gauntlets or flames?), two turned to the left, one to the right, each bearing three bezants of the same, and on a ground of gules undulating.

It is, moreover, possible that these coats of arms of Jacob Sulat are symbolic and cryptic, speaking or singing as they ought to do in the true blazon, of which science was long the foremost among all others. Whether this be Jacob's shell or comb (pecten Jacobeus), the flames differing according to one of the three fires, or the gauntlet of arms necessary for the great endeavour—the pair of which is found again atop the athanor at Dampierre-sur-Bautonne (Les Demeures Philosophales, Editions Jean Jacques Pauvert; see the plate, p. 178)— it is certain that these variations belong to alchemy, just as, beneath the chevron of the alembic, the three bezants recall the three golds, upon the churning waves of the Red Sea.

In short, projection and transmutation could not be better presented to the eyes and the intellect – oculis et intellectui – than in this apotheosis, which leads us to quote what appears to be Magophon's closing address in his *Hypotypose*. The vigour is rich in a substance that seems youthful and yet belongs to ancient alchemy. Lines written more than fifty years ago, which cannot fail to make an impression on impartial scholars of modern physical chemistry:

‘It is a gross error to believe that, in human beings, the soul leaves the body with the last breath. The soul itself is entirely flesh, for matter is a manifestation of the spirit in various states, dependent upon a greater and more subtle spark, which is the God of every organism; and if Science denies the reality of the spirit because it has never found any trace of it, it dishonours its own name. A corpse, rigid and cold, is by no means dead in the absolute sense. An intense life—though happily unconscious and devoid of perceptible reactions—continues in the grave, and it is from this horrible and more or less protracted struggle—which is the Purgatory of the Religions—that matter, distilled, sublimated, transmuted and evaporated by the action of the Sun, rises to the amorphous plane which has its degrees ranging from air to elemental light, and from this to the primal fire where everything ultimately resolves and from which everything emanates anew. »

Manget's 1702 version

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